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FAITH'S TRIAL.

REV. D. F. JARMAN, M. A.







FAITH'S TRIAL;

OR,

ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE PRACTICALLY APPLIED.

BY THE

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BLOOMSBURY.

Third Edition.

LONDON:

WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT,
24, PATERNOSTER-ROW, AND 23, HOLLES-STREET,
CAVENDISH-SQUARE.

1858.

141. d. 209.

LONDON: WERTHEIM, MACINTOSH, AND HUNT,
24, PATERNOSTER-ROW,
AND 23, HOLLES-STREET, CAVENDISH-SQUARE.



PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

MY desire to re-write this little Work has been the reason why so many months have been allowed to elapse since it was out of print. Health and opportunity were, however, wanting, and by the advice of many kind friends I have now given up the idea of extensive alteration, and have sent it forth again to the press in almost its original shape.

D. F. J.

February, 1854.

TO THE CONGREGATION OF
BEDFORD CHAPEL.

THE following pages are founded upon the imperfect notes and still more imperfect recollections of a Course of Lectures delivered some time since; and the interest which many of you expressed in them, first induced me to think of publishing them. A large portion of this Book was printed off several months ago, and I must own that if I had not been thus committed to the work, my present opinion of its desert is such, that it never would have seen the light. But most sincerely can I assert, that as I have more and more felt the intrinsic merit of these pages to be inappreciably small, so have my prayers been fervent for that spiritual power which can give effect to the truth, however feebly it may be spoken. And if those prayers be answered, then

the great aim of my publication is answered ; for a Minister's reputation is measured by his usefulness ; he knows how short-lived and unreal is the fame of talent and learning ; and therefore he seeks that better reputation which consists of shining "as the stars for ever and ever," and which can alone be derived from turning "many to righteousness." If, then, these pages, by God's grace, comfort one mourning soul, stablish one unstable heart, or arrest one careless mind, it will add to that reputation which is the Minister's greatest ambition, and which outlives the carved letters on a tombstone or the type of a biography.

Let me add one word of defence to that of apology. In my view of Abraham's trial it may appear to some that I have laden the Patriarch with a great many more doubts and fears than he ever entertained. But I regard it as far more accordant with God's Word and Christian experience, to suppose that these doubts appeared and were overcome, than to esteem Abraham above all human frailty or Satanic suggestion ; and I view the example as ten-fold more practical and encouraging, when I see in the Patriarch's

journey to Moriah, a "*fight* of faith," rather than a mere triumphal progress after a previous complete victory. Again, I have thought it more in accordance with the facts of the case, and God's object of trial, to suppose that, as in the former Divine command to leave house and friends, so in the required sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham firmly believed he would have to consummate the act demanded of him. His faith staggered not even at Isaac's anticipated death.

Let me now commend these pages to your heart, and to God's blessing. May they teach you the serious deficiencies of your faith! May they produce a longing desire for more strength, more perseverance, more "joy in believing!"

D. F. J.

April 6th, 1852.

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FAITH'S TRIAL;

OR,

Abraham's Example Practically Applied.

CHAPTER I.

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL.

EXAMPLE is an invariable element in every man's education. More or less he is sure to be shaped by it. He was first created after a pattern; in the "likeness" of God was he made; and still does he carry this original constitution graven in his nature; he will copy something. So long as God was the only image in our hearts, this tendency to imitate was our safeguard; and it was only when the depraved soul had admitted a thousand forms of evil, that this force of example became our ruin.

To oppose these patterns of sin, God has surrounded us with ensamples of holiness, and has put His own Son at the head of them. Our great Example is Christ. We are to walk as He walked. We are to tread in the very steps, and learn the very paces of our Saviour. Our life is not an isolated or un-

trodden course ; it is not a pathless desert ; it is not an experimental journey ; it is not merely a mapped road ; but all along the wilderness, to the very banks of Jordan, there is a beaten track—beaten by His steps.

There is an inexpressible power and charm about this mode of teaching us the way in which we are to go. Christ has actually made a pathway for you with his own feet. Look even at earthly analogies, and you will see the force of this fact. If a dear mother be dead, and there is some favourite walk which day after day she pursued until her steps had worn away the grass, and left a footpath to mark where she loved to wander, how fondly would you watch that path ! how jealously would you remove every weed which strove to overgrow and obliterate it ! how constantly would you be found walking where she walked ! And in domestic arrangements the same spirit would influence you. You would not allow any of her dear ways to be infringed or forgotten. She had family prayer, and all worldling though the son may be, he must have it too ; she kept the Sabbath, and he must keep it too ; she went to the house of God, and he must go too—ay, and he must go the same way there as she did. And if natural affection gives such power to precedent, Oh ! what should be the power which the love of Christ imparts to it. Surely if that love be shed abroad in our hearts, there will not be a stronger or a dearer motive to holiness than this—to walk as He walked.

What a sure guide have we here ! The very footprints of Christ ! Not that we are to expect exactly

the same events or the same trials of obedience and submission. But still may we follow Christ by studying well His acts, imbibing His spirit, and thus drinking deeply of that fountain from which all His deeds flowed. Above all, we must pray for that Spirit who can take of the things of Christ and show them unto us ; who can so interpret and apply our Master's example, that our life may be a modern edition of our Lord's life—a living epistle of Christ. Imbued with the spirit of His every act, we shall be at no loss for a criterion by which to try each course of conduct which may offer itself to our adoption. It may be a deed which never presented itself to our Saviour in any shape ; but still His example applies. “Knowing, as I do, His spirit, can I picture to myself the Redeemer doing the act in question ? Would it not have been an inconsistency in Him, and have tarnished His memory ? Should I not have been amazed and grieved to see Him do it ? ” If so, it is a forbidden act—bidden by Christ's example. We must avoid it, if we would walk as He walked.

But though we are thus to take our Saviour as our great example, we are not precluded from adopting the steps of holy men, so far as they followed Christ. And there are some things in which, from the very nature of the case, Christ could not be our ensample, and we must therefore look to regenerate man alone for our pattern. For instance, we cannot find any guide to penitence in our Saviour's life, except indeed it be the tears He wept over *our* sins. So likewise it was impossible for Him to give us a practical lesson, in His

own person, of faith. True, He could rely upon His Heavenly Father, and trust Him even in His soul's sorrow unto death, and so far could illustrate faith. But here we must stop. Christ was Divine ; knew all things and saw all things. His Omniscience completely precluded the exercise of that faith which Paul defines as " the substance of *things hoped for*, the evidence of *things not seen*." And thus among the many instances of this Christian grace which the Apostle adduces in the 11th chapter of the Hebrews, our Saviour is not mentioned. Equally does the same Apostle assert this principle when he tells us that " we are saved by hope, but hope which is seen is not hope." Hope is often used in the Gospel as a term for faith, and in this passage there can be no doubt it is so employed, for it declares " we are saved " thereby ; so that we must understand the declaration thus—" faith which is seen is not faith." We therefore conclude that an all-seeing Saviour could not be said fully or really to display this Christian grace. Indeed, we may go still further, and assert that faith is incompatible with any high state of knowledge. An act of faith is impossible for an angel ; it is impossible for a glorified spirit ; how much more is it impossible for an Omniscient Saviour.

Nevertheless, God left not Himself without witness, nor us without example ; but He raised that which the Apostle terms a " cloud of witnesses " to bear testimony of this cardinal Christian grace ; and among them he set forth one illustrious pattern, and gave him a prominent place in His word, so that we may have

before us a burning and shining light, to mark the road which we are to tread. The example of Abraham stands out from all the rest on account of its remarkable character, and the conspicuous place which God has given it in the Old Testament chronicles of faith, and in the apostolic epitome of faith's memoirs. It was evident that the Divine intention was to draw out a striking and illustrious example for all ages to copy ; it was to give a sound so clear and loud that it would rouse the unbelieving sleeper and make even the deaf hear ; it was to light up a planet in the firmament of Grace so bright and glorious as to arrest the wandering eye, shed its strong beams even through the closed lids of the blind, and give the groping searcher after faith a polar star to direct his course. There were many distinguished believers who lived before Abraham, and many after him ; but among them all God has set the mark of pre-eminence upon him, and has given him the name of "The father of all them that believe"—a father even among those who preceded him.

How far this relationship is established by facts, and what it is which this father of the faithful teaches his children, we now purpose to examine.

CHAPTER II.

ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE ATTAINABLE.

ABRAHAM is a favourite subject for the artist's pencil. But in most of the paintings, we behold a figure erect and commanding, his countenance ploughed with stern lines of determination, an eye which makes resistance quail and tremble, and features which display a natural decision of character capable of pursuing its object at any cost. You would think love an easy sacrifice for such a being ; you would say at the very first glance, "I could tell beforehand that man would give up his all to accomplish his purpose ; I can understand his offer of Isaac."

I recollect seeing a painting the very opposite of all this. Before me stood the Patriarch, a decrepid and weak old man ; he had lost his stature, for years had bent him down ; there was a shrinking back from the deed, a rebellion in every joint ; his face harrowed with grief, wearing an expression of intense agony, and evidently appalled by the act it was contemplating ; his arm half lifted up, and apparently questioning whether it should do the deed or not. My first impression was, "It is wrong, utterly wrong." And yet there was something on that canvass which kept me gazing, and at last altered my opinion entirely. There was a certain speech about the uplifted eye which you could

not mistake ; there was a peculiar and inexplicable expression overshadowing the agony of feature ; there was a heavenly something about the countenance which told you that after all the deed *would* be done, and that the struggles you saw were but the weakness of man contending in unequal and unavailing effort with the might of the Spirit. The man would evidently draw back, but the God would as evidently triumph. Human power was all directed to avoid the sacrifice ; but heavenly power—God working in that refractory heart to will and to do of His good pleasure—would certainly consummate the offering. That painting was a faithful likeness. I recognized Abraham.

The Patriarch was not by nature a firm man ; much less was he a stern man of cold heart. There are facts of his previous life which prove him to have been originally of a somewhat shrinking and cowardly disposition. We look in vain for moral firmness in the case of Sarah's sojourn in Egypt. He resorted to a falsehood as a safeguard against his fears lest strangers should slay him to obtain his wife ; and notwithstanding he saw the evil and mischief resulting from this deception, he again practised it on Abimelech with the same purpose. His domestic life altogether indicates a pliant and yielding disposition. The short narration of Sarah's imperious and overbearing conduct in Ishmael's case (*Gen.* xiii. 8-10), is very significant. The division of land with Lot goes to prove the same point ; there is no stern demand of strict justice ; he does not insist upon his due ; he does not even award the nephew his portion of territory ; but he gives up his

right of adjudication, which he possessed by seniority and patriarchal title, and meekly does he allow his younger relative to select his own land and pasturage. Even in his prayer for Sodom, there evidently is seen the pitying and earnest, yet fearful and undecided suppliant : he does not sternly leave the city to its doom ; he does not put forth one general supplication for mercy ; but the ground of his petition is moved and shifted in a way, which, to say the least, is not the act of a firm unyielding nature. Yet if these proofs do not establish the contrary of constitutional boldness, there is at least no proof of its existence ; there is nothing to indicate that the parent's sacrifice had any sort of origin or support in natural disposition. We know that one who was weak in bodily presence, and in speech contemptible, was chosen out of the rest as the very chiefest of the Apostles ; and the probability is that one of the most infirm and naturally unlikely of all the Patriarchs was made strong out of weakness, and distinguished above many physical and mental Samsons, as a Father in grace.

We are apt to consider such examples far above, out of our reach. We reckon them as giants from the womb, instead of giants by grace. We attribute to them natural powers which we have not. In fact we treat them as superhuman beings of a different race, and moving in a different sphere. What powers, for instance, we are apt to ascribe to Paul. Raphael does but embody the general conception, when in his cartoon he draws a huge powerful figure upon Mars Hill, evidently a very Boanerges, denouncing the idolatries of

Athens with the action of a Demosthenes, and the voice of a Stentor. Yet such a portrait is drawn from the acts, and not from the person, of the Apostle. That form so magnified by imagination was probably insignificant and emaciated, shrunken by hardships, dwarfish by nature, or distorted by disease ; at all events we know that his "bodily presence" was "weak," (2 Cor. x. 10.) yea, even "base." (2 Cor. x. 1.) Instead of those loud tones which could startle an idle crowd into attention, or those gentle accents which could charm even brutes into love, we should probably have heard a small weak voice, whose sound was either ridiculous or repulsive ; at all events we know "his speech" was "contemptible." (2 Cor. x. 10.) What a contrast to everything we could have imagined ! If you had seen this preacher to millions—this Father in Christ of myriad Gentile souls—you had said, "Why send such a man as this ? How completely unfitted for his mission ! speech and presence too against him, what can he do ?" God chose him for the very reason that he could do nothing, that grace must do all, and therefore that in him Christ might eminently be set forth. Yet how complete is our mistake ! How apt are we to attribute the simple effects of grace to imaginary powers of nature ! James guarded against this false conception when he stirred up the early church to holy emulation by telling them that Elias, with all his zeal and faithfulness, was a man "subject to like passions as we are." This is just our error ; we do not esteem them as our counterparts in infirmity ; we have formed utterly false notions of them as men ; and we

therefore regard them as inaccessible. Yet they had nothing of human constitution which we have not. Abrahams, as men, are to be found in abundance; they are everywhere; they are here. And why may not they be Abrahams after the spirit, as well as after the flesh? You start on the same ground, and why should you not reach the same goal? The Patriarch was probably even behind you in many natural qualifications; grace alone distinguished him. And is that grace less freely or abundantly bestowed now? Has its virtue worn out, or its giver become niggard? And if not, then why have Abrahams become extinct? Why may not you equal the Patriarch's faith? Simply because your desires and prayers are more contracted than his. The vessels are both the same size; the excellency of the power to fill them remains the same; and the only difference is this—the mouth of the olden vessel is broader and more open than that of the new. There is no reason in nature or grace why you may not all be Abrahams. The power which supported him yet waits to support you; the Spirit which led him still offers to lead you; grace is as mighty now as ever. Strange it would be if the covenant of circumcision gave man more of the Spirit's might than that covenant which Christ has sealed with His blood. No! a Saviour crucified, a Saviour risen, a Saviour glorified, a Saviour interceding, are every one of them arguments in your favour; they are guarantees of grace far beyond any ritual covenant; they are assurances to you that any amount of grace is attainable, that you may be a spiritual Abraham, yea, that you may obtain more

Abrahamic grace than the Patriarch himself, and thus out-Abraham Abraham.

But though the power provided is amply sufficient to enable us to emulate the faith of Abraham, yet you object, that you will not have the same scope for the exercise of that power ; your circumstances are different ; you are never likely to be commanded to take a son of special promise and slay him as a sacrifice to God. True, the deed is great, and probably, as a single act, it stands and will stand alone and unequalled ; but there is often, as it were, a congeries of trials, which may even surpass, in its sum total, the amount of suffering which Abraham endured. A long succession of lesser sacrifices, following one on the heels of another, and keeping you in a state of constant depression for years, may call for more than the strength of faith required for Isaac's sacrifice. Sustained labour—sorrow scattered over a large surface—is far more difficult to bear than any crushing but momentary load. A strong man may easily walk twenty-four miles a-day for a fortnight together ; but break up this distance, and distribute it over the entire day and night ; compel him to walk half a mile in each half hour. The distance is the same, but the effect is altogether different. The harassed traveller cannot bear this unceasing drain on his strength ; he has no unbroken rest, no time for nature to recruit before her energies are again taxed ; and often has such an attempt ended in almost fatal exhaustion. There is an analogy between body and soul ; a number of little trials are more than equal to a great one ; like the half mile to each half hour,

they keep the moral bow continually strained and bent, and thus tend to destroy its elasticity. You may kill a man with drops of water as well as by immersing him in a flood. The Chinese have a mode of punishing criminals, by which the offender is so placed that he cannot move, and then drop after drop of water is trickled upon his head, until he first goes mad, and then dies : that is worse than a sea to drown him. To borrow an illustration from Abraham's history, — a number of Ishmaels expelled, certainly equal an Isaac slain ; a number of minor losses try the faith as severely as a son sacrificed.

Now if this principle be true, then is it very possible that you may have occasion for all Abraham's faith, and all his grace. Perhaps the beginning of sorrows was the loss of your wealth ; friends then neglected you, and one by one they dropped off ; scarcely a day passed but you brought home the sad news of some fresh trouble ; your reputation is lost ; your credit is refused ; your resources gradually dwindle ; house after house is quitted for one smaller ; comfort after comfort is abridged ; till perhaps at last want looks in upon your once blooming children with its gaunt, haggard face ; they grow paler and paler, and soon, like lilies without water, they droop and die. And you, instead of becoming stronger to bear this accumulating load, are daily losing your physical energies. And this is no uncommon case. A parallel, if not a counterpart, occurs daily. Trials of many sorts have step by step brought you to such a pathos of sorrow, that no single calamity could produce an equal amount

of depression ; no single blow could have struck you so low. And what are you to do ? Where are you to look ? Why ! this is the moment when you may prove to the world and the Church that Abrahams are not extinct, and Abrahamic grace is not diminished. Look to the same power, and you shall achieve the same result. Take hold of the same arm, and you shall bear the same amount of trial with the same glorious issue. No spiritual attainment shall be impossible. No historied achievement shall be beyond your emulation. No giant in the faith so tall of stature, but if grace be your food, and Christ your strength, your stature may equal his.

CHAPTER III.

THE NATURE OF FAITH'S TRIAL.

GOD tries men ; Satan tempts them. God sits as a refiner of silver, to purify it ; Satan as a base coiner, to alloy it. Both often use fire ; but the fire of heaven burns out the dross, whilst the fire of hell amalgamates more and more base metal with the lump. The two operations are diametrically opposed, though the means are often the same. Not that God ever adopts the jesuitical device of a bad means for a good end ; but the sameness of means arises in this way—God often overrules for good that bad means which has been employed by Satan for evil ; and Satan, on the other hand, sometimes tries to appropriate the Lord's good means, and pervert them to evil. Thus Paul's thorn in the flesh was both a Divine and Satanic trial ; it was a "messenger of Satan sent to buffet" him, and yet he tells us it was given him lest he might be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations vouchsafed to him. By the adversary it was contrived that it might buffet him, and wring murmurs from his suffering spirit ; by God it was overruled to keep him humble and submissive. Thus is it frequently seen in our Saviour's dealings with His people, that Satan's effort to tempt is actually used by the Lord as His own trial to purify. The temptation may manifestly origi-

nate in hell, and fiendish malignity may evidently be detected in all its assaults on your faith ; but you are not for this reason to suppose that you are delivered over to the will of your enemy. There is no trial of *any* kind which is not either devised or overruled for the sanctification of God's people. The Lord takes the very fire of the coiner, He breathes upon it, brightens its murky flame, and turns the very embers which the deceiver has kindled, into a purifying furnace, out of which the virgin gold shall come at last without a vein or speck of alloy. Thus all spiritual trial, whatever its source, is either planned or permitted to purify us : and where it does not produce this result, it is because the soul resists the action of the heat, remains obstinately hard and unmelted, clings wilfully to its alloy, and retains a perverse affinity for the base metal which has grown with it in its native pit.

God sits as a refiner of His people ; His object is to purify and not to punish ; and hence our surest escape from sorrow is not to struggle against the sorrow itself, but against the sin which demanded it. To pray that affliction may be removed, is just as childish and ignorant a request as that of the babe entreating its mother to wipe off the pungent but healing ointment. Pray first that the wound may be healed, and that prayer answered, you will find the irritating plaster is no longer adhesive ; it falls off of itself. Directly trial of any kind comes, do not set about devising means of escape, but deliberately weigh its specific purpose, and supplicate grace to fulfil it. It were but insane policy to take an emetic when the physician has administered

a medicine ; the best way is to assist its operation, and make its passage through the system as easy and effectual as possible. The only effect of resistance is to make the process longer and more painful ; it cannot *arrest* that process altogether. Tears are sent to water faith and love ; and if you would wish those drops to cease, then faith and love must grow : vain are all your efforts to raise an artificial covering over your head ; the moisture will percolate the closest and thickest texture of your shelter ; it will find its way to the plant of grace, till that plant grows. When a Christian prays, " Lord, take away this cloud," it is at least a superfluous, if not an unbelieving prayer ; only let him supplicate his Saviour for the faculty of growth, and he has virtually prayed for the cloud's dispersion ; for that growth and that dispersion are invariably contemporaneous. To expect that God will release you from sorrow without your amendment, is much the same as to suppose that love will torture you without an object. If the Lord's trial were *judicial*, then a remission of our sentence would be the great object of our prayer ; but since it is *corrective*, the work of removing sorrow must begin with removing sin, and the prayer for deliverance must take the form of that which Job uttered, " Make me to know my transgression and my sin." The shortest way out of trouble is that which leads to faith and holiness.

When therefore I would know how far a Christian is from joy, I would not ask whether his earthly prospects are brightening and his friends increasing ; but I would look at his spiritual improvement, quite sure

that if during his affliction he has not grown in grace, there are more trials in store ; his sunshine is but that of an April sky, the cloud will soon return, and the Lord will lift his rod again and again. But if I find that as sorrows increased, so did the sanctification of the Spirit abound, till every sorrow became the seed of a beauteous flower of grace, then I know that this man is not far from a remission of trial. I do not say that earthly discomforts, or even persecutions, will cease, but I do say that they *will cease to try* him—they will lose their bitterness. He will be able to sing in a dungeon, “to rejoice in tribulation,” and to declare in the very face of expected death, “None of these things move me.”

And where are we to look for this moral efficacy ? Certainly not in the medicine itself. Sorrow has no inherent power ; or perhaps we ought to say, that by itself it has a hardening effect ; it is not an excellent thing in itself ; it is not to be found among the blessings of heaven which are *intrinsically* excellent. No ! it is a deadly poison, and only rendered medicinal when compounded and administered by the Physician of Gilead. It is, then, the Spirit of God by trial—it is *sanctified* affliction—which alone can work our good, and lead to holiness.

But since God alone gives trial efficacy, why cannot He give the efficacy without the trial ? of what use is trial ? how does God employ it ? Some speak of the believer's trial as though it were a means employed by God, for His own information, to find out the qualities of our heart and the strength of our faith. But the Lord

knows such facts without trial. Our Creator is not a mere spiritual experimentalist, who needs a long course of practical tests before He can arrive at the truth. His science is not inductive, but intuitive. A mere volition on His part is more searching than the most careful analysis of the chemist, or all the combination, separation, and comparison of the philosopher. A look of God can resolve the intricate mesh-work of the human heart into single strands, and make every spiritual pulse as apparent as though it were the heaving of a volcano. The Lord "knoweth our frame"—every part as well as all—every weakness as well as every faculty; and even the unconceived thought—the "thought afar off"—is understood by Him. It is not necessary then that we should be put to the proof, in order that God may estimate our amount of faith and love; neither is it needful for our Maker to try our strength by actually piling burdens upon our shoulders, for He can tell to the very grain what we can bear, and what will crush us. The promise that He "will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear," clearly implies a previous knowledge of the extent of our ability. Yes! God can weigh in the delicate balances of His Omniscience every power, bodily, mental, or spiritual; a mere glance reveals to Him every weakness of our soul; and therefore trial is not intended to usurp the province of Omniscience, or to teach that which the Lord knows without teaching.

Yet we often meet with scriptural statements that God sends trial to His people in order to prove them, and to know what is in their hearts, whether they will

keep His commandments or not. Thus were the Babylonish ambassadors sent to Hezekiah, and we are told that "God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." And in Abraham's case, after the ram was substituted for Isaac, the Angel Jehovah says, "Now I know that thou fearest God"—as though He did not know it before. But all such representations, like those in which God is said to repent, are mere human similitudes to explain the Divine character and actions to our infirm understanding; they are accommodations of the infinite to the finite. Thus to repent gives us the idea of anger exchanged for pity, and punishment for mercy; in fact, just such a course of conduct as is indicated by human repentance, without its grief and its acknowledgment of previous error. And so, likewise, to search and see what is in man, implies a proceeding similar to human analysis, without its accompanying infirmity of knowledge, and previous ignorance of the results to be developed. When, therefore, we read that the Lord tries us, to see whether there be any evil way in us, we are quite sure He knew that way as certainly and exactly as though a thousand practical proofs had declared its existence.

Why, then, does God try His people? How does He employ trial? He aims, not at *knowledge* of their condition, but at *development* of it. His object is to open out to *your own* eye the book of your heart, to display before *you* the letters which He Himself has already seen, and to pour such a light upon them that their true meaning and character may be understood

by you. The frequent aim of sorrow is to "show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." God, it is true, shows us our sins at all times—in joy as well as sorrow—but we are dazzled by pleasure, or deafened by the ringing of our increasing gold, and we do not see the crimson spot to which the Lord points, nor do we hear His condemnation of our sin. Sorrow throws a shadow before the world's gaudy colours, and the eye once more recovers its power of distinguishing objects, and discerns between red and white; the din of commerce is hushed; and then, in the midst of sad silence, we hear that voice of the Spirit which all along has been uttering its gentle rebukes, and bidding us "lay aside the sin which doth so easily beset us." Thus we are not to suppose that because we are convinced for the first time of some special transgression in the hour of grief, that we were never taught its guilt before; but our sole cause of wonder should be that we did not hear that teaching. Our ignorance of guilt never arises from Divine silence, but always from the carnal obesity which makes the heart dull and deadens all its spiritual faculties. Sorrow is leanness sent into the soul to quicken our torpid perceptions, and make a way for the Lord's voice.

At other times trial is sent, not so much to point out actual sin, as it is to expose some internal weakness—some latent tendency to evil. There is a flaw in the metal, and since it has escaped your notice, God puts the lump in the proof-house, and that flaw is soon made visible—David's impure affections, and Peter's "fear of man," were thus brought to the light. Or, perhaps,

there is some muscle of the soul shrunk for want of use—some talent buried and wrapt in a napkin—and temptation is to us as a gymnasium, strengthening that which was weak by athletic exercise, and gradually developing that which was attenuated even to deformity, until the might of the Spirit has by trial so completely matured our strength that the babe in Christ stands forth in all the gnarled muscle and starting sinew of spiritual manhood.

But whether God's purpose be to point out an actual sin, to expose a guilty tendency, or to expand a dwarfish grace, yet, in every case, the principle of trial is one; it is for our good and not the Lord's profit; it is to teach and discover to us our deficiencies, and not to give information to him who "needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knoweth what is in man."

The trial of faith then is briefly this—a stripping off the vine's broad green leaves which before hid and garnished its fruitlessness, and a purging it that it may bring forth more fruit; trial is, as it were, the breath of the Lord, conveyed in some "north wind" of earth to shake the tree, prevent its branches from settling themselves into habitual deformities of growth, loosen the earth around it, and make its roots strike deeper, its boughs spread wider, and its top shoot higher.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REALITY OF TRIAL.

A BRAHAM'S offer of Isaac was not "a solemn farce," as a scoffer has said ; but it was a real sacrifice—real, as God who searches the heart counts reality. In every spiritual aspect the deed was actually completed ; and even in the mechanical obedience of the body to the resolved purpose of soul, there only lacked the fall of the uplifted knife to make it a finished sacrifice. The Patriarch did not act under the uncertainty that *perhaps* he would have to kill Isaac ; he did not give his son to God under an impression that the gift would not be taken ; but he had so fully made up his mind that the youth *must* die, that when the child of promise was restored to him, we are told by the Apostle that the Patriarch figuratively received him *from the very dead*. (*Heb. xi. 19.*) This entire passage derives its sole meaning and force from the fact that Abraham looked upon his son as so sure a victim that he was esteemed already slain. Figuratively there was as wonderful a resurrection of Isaac to the Patriarch as was the resurrection of Lazarus to Martha and Mary ; it was in effect all one, as though the clay-cold corpse had been given back a living son into the arms of a bereaved father.

The father's entire plan bears the impress of a fixed

conviction that Isaac must die, and die by his parent's hands. Watch how the Patriarch leaves the young men behind, who in all probability would have prevented the slaughter. Yet if he had purposed to offer a mere lamb, or if he had thought his journey would end in such a deed, they might reasonably have gone to Moriah and joined in sacrifice. And every act bears the same clear stamp; every detail flows on to the same distinct issue, till the fearful crisis was reached when Abraham took up the knife for the fatal blow. Whatever may have been the Patriarch's hope, one thing is sure—he went to Moriah with the firm belief he must actually slay Isaac.

But what was the hope which Abraham had? If he really expected that his son must be slain, how did he suppose the Divine promise would be redeemed? There was but one possible expectation; and it is thus distinctly stated by Paul—"accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." (*Heb. xi. 19.*) This, then, was what Abraham believed that God "*was able*" to do, and therefore *would* do, to redeem his promise. How, or when, or where it might take place he knew not. Perhaps years of anxious trial and expectation were to intervene. But however this might be, no hope of escape on this side the grave was cherished by Abraham. His journey was not a mere show of obedience which he knew would never be exacted; his preparations were not an unreal but well acted tragedy; his readiness was not a mere readiness to do everything but to kill Isaac; his generosity was not of that

very questionable character which offers a gift with the expectation that it will not be taken out of the giver's hand ; but in very deed of heart faith actually did slay Isaac, and the three days' journey to Moriah was as virtual an entombment of the son as though his calcined bones had laid in the cave of Machpelah waiting an expected resurrection.

But some may recollect Abraham's expression, " God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering ; " and perhaps they will assert that this sentence is a prophecy of deliverance. But if so, what does it prophecy ? God's provision of the *ram* ? Nay ; the term is "*a lamb* ; " and these two animals were quite distinct ; for a lamb was not esteemed a ram until it reached a certain age, and, conversely, a ram at a certain age could not be termed a lamb. But this, you say, is being too literal. Yet if you depart from the very word, "*a lamb*," (and you must do so in any case, since no actual lamb was provided,) then I ask, why may not the Patriarch's expression allude to God's provision of *Isaac* as a burnt offering ? Surely the lad far better answered to the tender, young, and promising lamb, than did the matured ram. So far then was this statement from any expressed hope of escape, that it was actually reaffirming the same conviction which Abraham's preparations had declared ; it was stating in figurative language that his own dear, tender, and precious "*lamb*" was doomed to die.

But did not Abraham say to the young men when he left them near Moriah, "*I and the lad* will go yonder

and worship, and *come again to you?* " (*Gen. xxii. 5.*) Very true ; yet this sentence will not bear the sense of a promise that both would return. It is a mere direction to his attendants as to the place of meeting. If you told your servants, " Stop here, and we will come back to you," would you think you had made a promise by which you, and *all your accompanying friends*, were bound to return, without one being left elsewhere ? No ! Your sentence, like that of Abraham, was a mere assignation of place, " Remain here ; do not follow us ; we, or one of us, will come back to you." The Patriarch simply meant, " Wait till we return." With perfect consistency Abraham could have come back alone.

We, therefore, may resume our original assertion—Abraham acted on a supposed certainty ; the sacrifice was determined ; the deed of gift was absolute, not conditional ; he did all with the firm conviction that Isaac must literally and irremediably be offered up to God by fire and knife.

There are many who can behave most heroically with trial in the far and uncertain distance. So long as self-denials and sacrifices are indefinitely shadowed in the dim future, so long as they are problematical, who so ready as these pseudo-Abrahams to meet them ! There have been sad instances of this spiritual dealing in promissory notes, given under the impression that no call for the money would ever be made, and that men may live, and satisfy both their neighbours and themselves, on the credit of this mere paper sacrifice. God does not require from us loud assertions of what

we would do under circumstances which we never expect to occur ; He does not desire us to tell the world how unflinchingly we would bear the tortures of persecution, and die in the flames for the sake of Christ ; but he requires some practical and real proof of our obedience. Conditional faith is very easy ; gifts ungiven do not cost much ; zeal, without a field for work, is readily kindled ; but the true proof that you possess the spirit of Abraham is *this*—are you ready *in act and deed* to give up this or that jewel as he gave up Isaac ? Are you willing to surrender any possession, or endure any suffering, in the full belief that God will ask and receive it from you ? Are you prepared, when the Lord's call and the Lord's time come, to take Isaac in one hand, and the wood, the fire, and the knife in the other ? Really to carry a daily cross is better than a mere hypothetical burning at the stake ; to endure this or that scoff for Jesus' sake is a surer evidence of faith than a doubtful courage, under anticipated racks and screws. What then are you actually doing or suffering for Christ ? I ask not what you would do if you were rich, or noble, or powerful ; I ask not how bold you would be if you were in your neighbour's place ; but my plain inquiry is whether you are giving any practical evidence of your faith in the Gospel by your conduct, and whether your life and conscience testify that your governing and ever present principle of action is, " I count all things but loss for Christ's sake." Ye who would serve Christ in a dungeon, are ye serving Him in your counting-house, or your parlour ? Ye who would give up your life for

the Gospel, are ye giving up that sinful pleasure, that unhallowed gain, that worldly love of applause? Ye who *would* do, *are* ye doing? If your fruits of faith be thus tangible and practical, then are ye children of Abraham, for his sacrifice was *real*.

There is sure to be some opportunity of sacrifice ; never yet was there a Christian without some appointed cross. Christ assumes this fact for granted when he says, " If *any* man will come after me, let him take up his cross,"—as though there could be no doubt whatever of "*any* man " having a cross to take. There must be some profit of business, or aim of ambition, or indulgence in pleasure, which is at least questionable. Look well about you ; look with a desire of giving God all He asks ; and you will be sure to find some trial He calls you to bear. Examine your life in the world, search your family, probe your heart ; give up that self-saving and penurious spirit which is always whispering, " Oh ! I give enough without giving this ! " pray for the Spirit to teach you that all you and your's are Christ's ; then you will not be long without finding an opportunity, not of conditional, but of *real* sacrifice.

CHAPTER V.

FAITH TRIED BY DUBIOUS OR CONFLICTING COMMANDS.

WHAT is a Divine command ? The question may appear strange and useless ; God's Word is full of commands ; yet often are there circumstances so complex and tangled, that no precept seems positively or precisely to meet the case. There is no difficulty when any great moral law is directly at issue ; we may be quite sure that even were our family dying of hunger, God's will is that we shall starve rather than steal. But there are many cases in which the letter of the law does not apply, and we have to search out its spirit ; we see such an apparent conflict of duties—such an equality of motives in each scale of the balance—that we know not to which we are to give the preponderance, we are in “a strait betwixt two ;” we feel with Paul, “what I shall do I wot not.”

What then is a Divine command in such a case ? Abraham could easily answer this question ; the words of the Lord to him were audible ; their meaning was clear ; mistake was impossible. And if we had lived in days when God spake with His servants as man to man, or gave intimations of His pleasure by dreams and visions ; if we could go to Aaron, and bid him consult the marvellous gems upon his breast ; if we could

summon prophets and seers to our counsel, and bid them speak the word of the Lord ; then had it been easy to define a command of God. But such means of ascertaining duty have ceased. True, we have heard of mysterious sounds and voices prompting men to certain actions, or warning them from others ; and in some few abstruse cases the evidence rests on the testimony of witnesses too holy to deceive, and too strong-minded to be made the dupes of an excited fancy. But in far the majority of instances, proof has been entirely wanting, the prompted action has turned out anything but inspired, and the entire revelation has evidently been the work of a mind constantly excited by a morbid longing after visions, and a discontent with truth unless it come in some miraculous and unearthly dress. The spirit has a fever upon it, and magnifies all its delirious fancies into facts ; and when a dream or a so-called presentiment does afford the slightest resemblance to the after event, then is it so nursed and suckled by imagination, that at last the faint and incidental similarity grows into such an exact counterpart of the subsequent fact, that you cannot tell which is which—the vision or the event. This state of mind is something worse than weak—it is dangerous, for it leads to a disregard of God's real teaching, and instead of affording a calm and steady light to the pilgrim's feet, it is a mere ignis fatuus glancing here and there, and finally extinguished in some pestilential marsh. It seems a reasonable and scriptural doctrine that God will not provide a supernatural means of enlightenment when he has already provided one which is natural ; he

will not commission a preacher from the dead when the open books of Moses and the prophets lie before us. In fact, every voice which has been uttered makes another voice less necessary, and therefore less likely ; every command which has been spoken makes the path of duty clearer for all succeeding ages ; every miraculous message to man makes a similar miracle more improbable.

Since then we must not expect particular revelations, are we not left in a place where many ways meet ? are we not entangled among a crowd of precedents, without knowing which to take ? Are we not thus left to the uncertainties of general rules, or multiplied examples ? No ! we are not ; for though signs in the heavens do not telegraph our duty, yet in every believer's case the command of God is personal and special ; there is no such thing as a mere generality in Divine teaching ; but the promise is, "I will instruct **THEE**, and teach **THEE** in the way which **THOU** shalt go, I will guide **THEE** with mine eye." The words of the precept on the written page may be published to millions, but the power and deep meaning of those words are conveyed by God's Spirit into the heart of every Christian separately. To him the Bible reads as so many private injunctions ; there is an interpreter within, which gives the most universal precept an additional force, and translates every "Ye" into "Thou," and every "They" into "I." General Epistles become letters superscribed to us ; sermons spoken to hundreds become secret words of counsel to our souls ; and whilst we look over the chart of our voyage to heaven, we gradually see

our special course dotted out before us, though no visible finger traces the line, and no audible voice declares the latitude in which we are to steer. Urim and Thummim are quenched, the pillar of cloud is dispersed, prophecies have failed, tongues have ceased, visions have become visionary, yet has each of us our several and separate guidance; we are "led by the Spirit" as units, and not as crowds; we are as personally directed on our particular course through the wilderness, as though the caravan consisted of but one pilgrim, and that pilgrim were I. In fine, we have as special a command from God as that which was given to Abraham, "Take now thy son."

Yet some will object that this mode of direction gives as much scope for fancy and deception as do mysterious dreams and voices. But it is not so; for the process is entirely different; it is almost opposite: the vision is soon gone like the flash of a meteor, and you can scarcely tell whether it be an optical delusion or a reality; but the ordinary teaching of God's Spirit is like the break of day, revealing the scene about you by an operation more or less gradual, and incapable of being mistaken for a mere phantasm: in the former case you have a moment's glimpse of surrounding objects, which may or may not be correct; but in the latter, you may deliberately examine the light itself, or the substance and position of those things on which it falls: in the former case you have nothing to deal with but abstract and instantaneous light—like the meteor, it is, so far as our senses can perceive, light and nothing else; but in the latter, the Spirit generally

employs some tangible and perceptible means through which His light is communicated, just as the beams of day are not beams alone, but are given forth from the globe of the sun, thus affording us a test of the reality of our perception of light far more suitable to our imperfect powers than the mere test of light alone. In other words, we may often prove that the sound we hear is the Lord's voice, by the trumpet through which He utters it. The whole science of visions and supernatural warning is like meteorology—spiritual astronomers know next to nothing of it; but the study of the ordinary influences of God's Spirit, is like that of the planets whose existence and motions may be tested night after night by thousands of telescopes.

What then, we ask, are those instruments, or bodies, through which the Spirit's light is shed upon our path? There is the page of God's word diligently and prayerfully studied—*studied* I say, for there is a way of using Scripture itself which is not study, but more resembles dipping our hand into a wheel of fortune than sober inquiry into God's will. I have met with many cases, in which a man has taken up the Bible, opened it at random, and lighted on some text, which he has then applied to his circumstances and acted accordingly; in any difficulty he at once resorted to this spiritual lottery, and though he must often have drawn a blank, yet his excited imagination painted it as a prize, and gave the random passage a forced meaning, which God never intended, and which the words would not bear. True it is that we may often find some cheering promise exactly applied to our case, when

we have not searched for it; we may even drop suddenly on it, like those persons we have described; we may find it in our morning's text, or it may rise in the still watches of the night, like a star, above the horizon of the soul's memory. But still we contend that even when thus found, it is not to be treated as a supernatural intimation, but must be prayerfully and earnestly examined to see whether it indeed be our very Saviour's voice to us or no. Such a plan will certainly save us from that wresting of Scripture which is often fatal to souls (2 *Pet.* iii. 16); it will make God's Word doubly precious to us; it will, like the searching proboscis of the bee into the secrets of the flowers, lade us with honey, and open out treasures of nectar to us, which the restless and uncertain flutterer never finds. I must take Christ's Gospel with me into my closet; I must, if I know of any such part, open on a page which specially applies to my case; I must read its truths with a heart rising in supplication for spiritual light, and wrapt in holy communion with my Saviour. This is what we call *study* of God's Word—study which shall assuredly end in some distinct perception of the way in which we are to walk.

Nor must we forget that the God who gave us His Word as a lamp to our feet is the same who orders the events of our life, and that therefore He may combine the two methods of instruction. God's *hand* often unveils the mystery of His *speech*; His *deeds* explain His *words*. Providence interprets what Grace has written, and the careful observer of the Lord's dealings will frequently find that Scripture is unfolded and

opened before him, by the very position into which his heavenly Father brings him. Some precepts of God's Word may have seemed like a finger-post to point along a certain course, and yet with the closest examination we could not discover any sign of a path in that direction—our way was blocked up on that side which the Lord indicated—we were utterly perplexed—but presently difficulties were removed, mountains sank to hillocks, and a road was cut by Providence straight along that very tract which was indicated by God's revealed Word. Peter is a case exactly to our point. God had told him that he was not to call anything common or unclean; and the Apostle knew not what to understand; he was bewildered and perplexed with all which he had heard and seen. The narrative tells us that "while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean,"—then comes Providence to interpret the command of Grace—"behold the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there." And Philip too—how perplexed must he have been when the command was uttered, "Arise and go from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert!" Go from a place where teeming souls are to be saved, and wander desolate and alone midst desert solitudes! how mysterious to the Evangelist! But Providence again explains the command; and there, across that trackless wild, approaches "a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, who had

charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning, and sitting in his chariot reading *Esaias* the prophet." The Divine order is plain ; doubt is dispersed ; a wide and promising avenue to Gospel truth lies open before Philip ; and who shall say but that many a soul now glorified, and many an African Church, now, alas ! extinct, but still claiming thousands of members in the Church triumphant, were called into existence by God through that mysterious errand of Philip "from Jerusalem to Gaza, which is desert."

Let us look well then to providential events, and we shall hear facts of our life and incidents of daily occurrence, like so many echoes, taking up and multiplying the still small and indistinct voice of Divine command, until doubt is removed, the previous whisper is made as clear and articulate as though it had been uttered from Mount Sinai with the voice of a trumpet—"this is the way, walk thou in it."

Nor must we forget the many Divine leadings which have been found in Christian intercourse. God often utters His voice by the lips of some believing companion ; truth *we* could not find has been revealed to *him*, and though we may have used the most promising means to attain the knowledge we desire—though we went forward, but the Lord was not there, and backward, but we could not perceive Him ; yet at last was some thought expressed—some word spoken—in Christian conversation, which flashed the truth upon our minds, and made darkness light within us. We are too reserved in our habits of intercourse ; we are too back-

ward in stating our difficulties ; there is too little of genuine fellowship in our so-called "communion of saints ;" there is far more friendship of Christians than Christian friendship. *Public* statements of our case are not desirable ; they jar every chord of a sensitive heart, they wound the feelings until they blunt them, and generally end in distracting counsel and confusing the sufferer. We desire not exposure but confidence, not a ripping open the soul's perplexities but a transfer of care from bosom to bosom. Let brother speak to brother, and friend to friend ; let the father encourage his son to take counsel of him in spiritual matters ; and let not the mother think it a strange work to watch and soothe her daughter's distress of soul. And above all, let not our minister be esteemed as a mere orator to crowds, or a last resort of the dying ; do not treat him as a pulpit fixture or as a robed official ; but go to him as a dear friend—not a confessor ; seek him as one who has much to do with souls, and whose special work it is to "support the weak ;" seek him as one on whose words, as a minister of Christ, you may expect a peculiar blessing, and whose speech and preaching to you in the parlour as well as the pulpit may come "in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Recollect that when an angel (though so wise and so fit a messenger) appeared to Cornelius, he declined to tell the perplexed centurion what he ought to do, but adopted the more tedious yet more significant plan of referring the soldier to one of Christ's ministers (*Acts* x. 3-7). And even Christ himself did precisely the same thing when the prostrate

and conscience-stricken Saul asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Ananias—not Christ—answered that question (*Acts ix. 6*). It is plain, therefore, that God often puts His word of counsel to souls into the mouths of His ministering servants.

Thus by many voices and means does the Spirit speak to the waiting, watching soul; the perplexed pilgrim is not left to ask his way among general rules, or to trace his path across an unmarked map, but if only he will inquire of the Lord, he will have a personal answer, his perplexities will be unravelled, commands will no longer seem to clash, a clear, definite, line of duty will be developed,—as clear as though God in human speech directed, "Take now thy son."

CHAPTER VI.

FAITH TRIED BY A CONFLICTING PROMISE AND COMMAND.

THE command to slay Isaac seemed to be given in the very face of previous promise. On Isaac was the covenanted future of Abraham built.

Yet why, after all, should not the gift of a "godly seed" be fulfilled in Ishmael? why may not he become the great nation which God had described to Abraham? No! the Lord himself had excluded such a refuge against despair; he had separated Ishmael; he had shut him out from THE promise, and had given him a distinct heritage for himself (*Gen.* xvii. 20). The son of the bondwoman could not be the prop of Abraham's hopes when Isaac was gone.

But perhaps another son may be born; Sarah may yet conceive again; the same power which gave her a child before, may now give her another; God's word may simply take another channel of fulfilment. Nay! this hope also was impossible; another son will not do; for God had declared emphatically of the promised seed, "My covenant will I establish with *Isaac*." If the Patriarch could make all his brother's progeny his own, not Huz, nor Kemuel, nor Chesed, nor the entire race of Nahor, could supply the void in God's faithfulness caused by Isaac's death.

But surely Abraham might have had another son, and named him after his slain brother ; he might have had a second " Isaac," and with him the covenant might be established. Would not such an expedient redeem the Divine word, and satisfy the terms of God's covenant ? No ! The Lord's promise had been so specific, and the terms of the promise so exact, that it was utterly impossible for desperation itself to seize on the hope of another child of promise. The language of God must refer to the very boy already born, and not another ; for after excluding Ishmael from the special gifts of Divine favour, the Lord declares, " But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, *which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time of the next year.*" The very Isaac is defined ; a future Isaac will not do in his stead. Abraham may have a hundred sons and name every one of them " Isaac ;" his seed may even be as the stars—innumerable ; it matters nothing ; for if that boy already born—if that Isaac whom he is now to sacrifice—if that identical and sole child—be destroyed, then must the Divine word be irremediably broken.

And now this very child, whose place could not be supplied by millions, must be taken ; he must be slain on an altar like some undistinguished and easily replaced lamb in the Patriarch's fold ; he must die ; and what then ? There certainly was one hope—a desperate hope—a hope against hope—a hope whose very conception in Abraham's bosom was almost as great a miracle as the fact of resurrection itself—God might raise Isaac from the dead. Yet Abraham had never

known of such a thing ; even future resurrection had been but very dimly revealed ; a restoration to life had never occurred, or we must have heard of such a fact ; and yet on this apparently impossible and unprecedented event the Patriarch rested his all (*Heb. xi. 19*). We might easily think of such a way of escape, for we have heard of Lazarus, and Eutychus, and the widow's son ; but how could Abraham have imagined such a case possible ? "Those limbs mangled with the knife and calcined by the flame, to assume their shape and grow into my Isaac's lovely form again ! Why ! even if I could believe that the dull eye could revive into brilliancy, and the cold lips become warm, and the pale cheek bloom with health, yet my drowning soul has not even such a straw as this to grasp. Eye and lips and cheek exist no longer ; they are ashes, mingled with the wood of yonder sacrificial pile. And shall ashes become man ? and even if they shall, will they not be made a different body for the same soul ? shall that dust be moulded into the very features of my darling boy ? "

The sacrifice of Isaac then could only be remedied by this one event, impossible with man, and unprecedented even with God. Substitution of another son was useless ; another Isaac would be no better than Ishmael ; none other than this very boy could be the child of covenant ; and therefore we say that, according to human judgment, God's command to Abraham was given in the face of previous promise.

And what a promise ! Was it a mere assurance of seed—a mere numerous progeny—a mere earthly greatness ? No ! Ishmael was to be "fruitful" and

multiplied exceedingly: twelve princes was he to beget, and he was to grow into a mighty nation. Here was enough to satisfy carnal ambition. Isaac's progeny could not exceed such royal earthly honours; and it was not said that it should. There was another, and a holier, and an infinitely more important promise wrapped up in Isaac; for after the might of Ishmael had been foretold by God, then he clearly and emphatically distinguishes the peculiar blessing which shall be entailed on Sarah's child,—“*But my covenant will I establish with Isaac.*” And what was that covenant? It is obvious it could not mean a mere covenant of progeny, for then it could not be thus said of Isaac specially, as distinguished from Ishmael,—“*but my covenant will I establish with Isaac.*” If seed had been the mere subject of promise, then was it as true of Ishmael as of his brother, that God's covenant was established with him. It must therefore be something distinct from number of offspring. And so it was. It was a covenant of blessing and grace and pardon—“an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee” (*Gen. xvii. 7*). Salvation was deposited, as it were, in Isaac; the assurance of Divine favour was coupled with him; the continuance of God's covenant was entailed on that boy's offspring. Yea! in him all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; from him the Shiloh was to come; from him was to be born that name alone given among men whereby we may be saved. And once let Isaac be slain to rise no more, then, in that lifeless form must Abraham read the cancelment of every hope

for time and eternity—the repeal of promised mercy—the doom of his own soul. “Isaac is dead! No covenant of grace now! No pardon now! No blessing now! No Saviour now!” . . . And yet faith could take THAT boy, and grasp the knife to slay him! That same knife must enter Abraham’s own heart; according to all human probabilities it must destroy even his own *Soul*, and yet he grasped it!

What a strange and mysterious contradiction! Here is the forefather of the Redeemer—the boy from whom Christ is hereafter to be born; and he is to die as a sacrificial lamb—a burnt offering—a type of Christ. As though God with one fell blow would destroy the hope of Israel, and in the very act of destruction mock his servant with the sign he had established as a guarantee that the hope would be fulfilled. It was like using the earnest of our inheritance to sweep away and devastate our inheritance itself. It was like employing the seal of the covenant as an instrument wherewith to cancel the covenant itself. This alone was a fearful trial of faith.

And can our circumstances ever resemble these? We believe they can, and often do. God may have placed you in a position of great spiritual peril. Your soul seems to be endangered. He has promised to save you, and yet has surrounded you with such a complication of snares and dangers, that salvation appears impossible. Cares “like a wild deluge” sweep over you; your business is all-engrossing; it demands your closest attention; it calls you early from your bed, and only allows you to retire when it has thoroughly

drained the energies of mind and body ; your family is increasing around you ; you dare not slacken your labours ; starvation or this drudgery lies before you. Now such a case appears to be utterly incompatible with the growth of piety ; it seems a flat contradiction of the promise, " Peace I leave with you." Yet it is clear that God has put a necessity upon you to remain in this employment ; He has so contrived circumstances that you cannot escape without violating duties on all hands. If you abandon your calling, then a much worse condition threatens. You dare not lie down and die ; this were suicide, and if you have lives depending on you, it were murder too. If your employment were in itself wrong and immoral, then it would be different ; in such a case God calls you out, and at all risks, even though you had a thousand Isaacs to leave, you must go. But as it is, your occupation is right in itself, yet owing to your own weakness and infirmities, it has an influence, as all business has, to draw your soul from Christ, and plunge it in a sea of anxieties. Your companions also may be among those spiritual fools who say in their hearts there is no God, and laugh at your scruples. You cannot rid yourself of them ; they may be employed by your master ; or they may be a part of your necessary stock in trade ; at all events, for some reason or other, escape from their society may be as impossible as giving up your calling altogether. Or perhaps your very family may be profane ; the father who bore you may look coldly on you as a saint ; your piety may wean you even from a mother's heart ; for Christ's sake you must remain like

a leper in your family—alone, and when not alone, still worse—a butt for mockery, or a thing to be loathed. And all these grievous spiritual stumbling-blocks, or some of them, or other which we have not named, may stand in your way to heaven, and there is no possible turning by which you may rightly avoid them. In fact, to stay or to go seems fraught with your soul's peril. How then can you be saved ?

Now such a position may appear hostile to your soul's welfare ; it may seem like handing you over to the wiles and power of Satan ; it may wear the aspect of imminent peril ; but if only you go on your way as Abraham journeyed with the doomed Isaac to Moriah, trusting in God's love and faithfulness, you will eventually find that this road right through the enemy's camp was really your safest road after all ; your mind and your habits may be so formed, that nothing but constant " fightings without " keep up the necessary fightings within ; like many a soldier after the flesh, you may not be fit for peace service ; the luxuries of repose may prove more fatal to you than the enemy's whole park of artillery ; so that war is actually your safest occupation ; resisting strong temptations may be the securest employment for you. Or perhaps God has some work for you to perform in the world's heart—some poor half-wrecked bark to draw out of the whirling sucking vortex—some soul to be converted from the error of his ways, and to shine at last as your joy and crown of rejoicing before the presence of Christ. At all events you may be quite sure that though every possible spiritual danger were accumu-

lated round you, yet is that position nought but a master-piece of strategy, planned by the Captain of your Salvation for your safety. Only trust in the Lord's wisdom, and lean upon his strength, and the very spear of the foe shall be your defence warding off some more dangerous and unseen weapon ; the sharp bosses of the world's buckler shall be the steel on which you sharpen your own sword ; the number of your enemies shall be but an index of your imparted graces ; the fierceness of the fight shall only predicate the splendour of your triumph and the brightness of your everlasting crown.

Whatever then may be our lot, let us only feel convinced that we are in the path of duty, and that God has verily said, "Take now thy son," then it matters not what apparent contradictions obedience may involve ; dangers may be incurred ; all may be risked ; but faith will feel secure in the Divine command, and rely on her Father's love and wisdom. She will dare her very existence at the word of her Lord ; she will stake her very salvation on the truth of her Redeemer ; she will give up her Isaac—her promise—her Shiloh—her heaven—into His hands into whom she has believed, persuaded that He is able and willing to keep that which she has committed to His charge.

CHAPTER VII.

FAITH SACRIFICING AFFECTION.

THE heart of the Patriarch was the primary point of assault in his trial of faith. True, it extended to reputation and honour, and, indirectly, even to wealth ; but the affections were the origin and centre of its power.

The words of God's command prove most clearly that the Divine purpose was to use the *father's heart* as an instrument wherewith to probe the *believer's faith*—"Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest." There is evidently a dwelling on these terms of fondness, and a multiplication of them, as though God were determined first of all to fan affection to its intensest heat, and then demand the surrender of its object. We might have expected some expression showing the smallness of any gift Abraham could offer to the Lord, some attempt to reconcile the father to the act, as on the former occasion of his forsaking his country and kindred and parent (*Gen.* xii. 1, 2) ; we might have looked for some cheering word of hope from God's lips, which, like balm, would heal the wound, or at least, like an opiate, would deaden the pain ; but no ! the Divine Giver of the bitter cup offers it undiluted to the Patriarch's lips, and as He puts it before him, He stirs up the dregs, and brings

to the eye every one of those acrid ingredients which compose the draught—"thy son—thy only son—thy son Isaac—thy son whom thou lovest;" every word was a rack on which a carnal heart would have been absolutely broken; every epithet was a deeper and deeper probing of the lancet, by which a regenerate heart was relieved of its impurities.

The flocks of the Patriarch were not asked. It had been a great sacrifice to give up those large possessions of which we are told, some years previously to Isaac's offer, that "Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." But though the command left them untouched, what would they be when the heir was gone? The Patriarch's herds had been to him as the wild goats on the hills—ownerless; his precious metals had been like the undug ore—scarcely to be distinguished from the earth at its side; yea, his riches had been positive afflictions, for like remembrancers of woe, they would have reminded him daily of what he could have made Isaac. Abraham, with all his wealth, would have been like a man with an immense wardrobe of the most costly garments, and behold! the wearer for whom they were made and fitted is dead. His large possessions had been as a sumptuous banquet spread out before a man whose appetite loathed even a crumb. Death's hand, which dimmed Isaac's eye, would have put out the lustre of his father's brightest jewels, cankered his shining gold, distempered all his flocks, and made him the poorest of all poor men—a Lazarus in heart with Dives' purple apparel and sumptuous fare—a Jacob

with his Joseph gone, and the many-coloured coat alone left—a bereaved father mocked with the ring, the fatted calf, and the best robe which he had prepared for his son.

And Isaac was now Abraham's only son. Ishmael was gone—gone at God's command (*Gen. xxi. 13*); "Very grievous" had the parting been (*Gen. xxi. 11*); for the Patriarch dearly loved the child of Hagar. "Oh that Ishmael may live before thee" was the old man's prayer even when Isaac was promised. And not long since he had been compelled to drive this boy and his mother from their home; with a sad heart he had seen them go; with solicitous care he had himself prepared food for them, and with anxious hand he had put the provisions on Hagar's shoulder (*Gen. xxi. 14*). And he had seen her and her son depart; he had regarded them as dead; he had turned to his remaining child as Jacob clung to Benjamin; Isaac had Ishmael's share of love as well as his own; a father's wounded affections had sought balm and refuge in him; he was the only son. Tear all ropes but one from a drowning man, and see how he clings to that one; there is even more energy in that single grasp now than there was in the strength he gave the many cords; his might is more than concentrated, it is increased. Take from a prisoner every hope but one, and see how his soul will fasten on that one; divided hope is a mere weak plaything to it; his every faculty fixes on it with a tenacity which could not be spread in equal force over many hopes. Abraham was this man of one rope, of one hope; for Isaac alone was left; he was an "only son."

And how painfully must the dear boy's name have struck on the father's ear, when he was told to take "thine only ISAAC"—"thy Laughter!" How much was there conveyed to Abraham's heart in that single epithet! It recalled his sin to his remembrance, when both he (*Gen.* xvii. 17) and Sarah (*Gen.* xviii. 12) esteemed the Divine promise of a child as so preposterous and absurd that they received it with laughter. The name was a lasting rebuke of their unbelief. Oh! was it not counter mockery to use a word pregnant with such meaning, and call the boy "Laughter" when the father was about to do a deed, which in itself, whether Isaac was given back or not, would so appal the heart and paralyze the features that the parent could never even smile again? Was this not a return in kind of Abraham's treatment of his God? No! It was merciful severity; it was to warn the Patriarch against former unbelief—as though God had said, "Beware! thou didst disbelieve when I gave him; disbelieve not again, but trust my word, and take thine Isaac—thy Laughter."

But still, though the name, as we believe, was given in rebuke, yet was joy mingled with reproof; it united chiding and mercy; there was mirth in the sound; and thus Sarah, in probable allusion to this fact, exclaimed, "God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear me will laugh also." Oh! God touched more than one sensitive cord of Abraham's heart when he said, "Tak Isaac." It told the father of that ungrateful mockery with which he heard the promise of a son pronounced; it told him how a forgiving God

had pardoned the offence, and turned the laughter of mockery into the laughter of joy ; it told him of the many years he had spent, with this Isaac—this “Laughter”—to wipe away his tears and wreath sorrow itself into smiles. And now he is to take this Isaac—and God, when he dooms the son to death, and the father to kill him, calls him “Thine only Laughter.”

And then to complete this array of the son's claims on his father's heart, the Lord terms him thy son, “whom thou lovest”—as though there were any occasion to tell Abraham *that*.

The reason of all this is obvious ; it was to make manifest the Divine purpose ; it was to say in plain language, “Lovest thou me more than these ;” it was but another edition of the command, “Go and sell *all* that thou hast, and come, follow me ;” “Take thy most precious treasure ; plead not to me, it is thy son, thine only son, thine Isaac, thy loved Isaac ; I know it all, and therefore have I chosen him rather than anything else thou hast or art. I want thy choicest jewel ; thy gold will not do ; thy flocks will not do ; thy Sarah will not do ; thyself will not do ; it must be that gem brighter than all—that gem thou wouldst buy with thy life ; that gem embedded in thy heart ; it must be ‘thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.’”

God is not contented if you only give him what you can easily spare ; he will not be satisfied with a mere secondary treasure ; but often he demands your chief delight, and bids you surrender the most precious

thing you have. There is to be no reserve—no treasure kept back—no bidding God to take anything **EXCEPT** that. This withholding aught from the Lord proves there is a radical defect in your faith—an idol in your heart—an actual necessity for the sacrifice ; and depend upon it, God will refuse all else till you give up this self-appropriated jewel. Your Saviour's honour, and your own eternal welfare, require your Lord's demand of that particular delight. If there were no other reason, the fact that you have put it in a reserved corner of your heart is abundantly sufficient cause for your Lord to say, "Give up that secreted treasure." And he will say so ; nor must you plead, "There is my gold, take that ; there are my flocks, take them ; there is Ishmael, take him ; there is Sarah, take her ; there is myself, take me ;" for the Lord demands thy prime joy, especially if it be a joy kept back ; the Lord's requirement is precise, "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac."

There are many ways in which your faith is thus tried, and your love is called to give up its treasures. True, you are not told to offer up an Isaac on the altar ; but there are other things which are "Isaacs" to you, and which God requires you to surrender ; the "great possessions" were the young ruler's Isaac, pharisaism was that of Paul, and expected worldly greatness was that of all the apostles who followed Christ in the days of His flesh. Everything dear to us, whether within or without, may be our Isaac ; and oftentimes we find that the most hidden of our idols is our dearest. What can be dearer to you than your own will—that inbred

desire to walk where you list, do as you like, and live for yourself? it is your nature; it is like the instinctive love of life; it is that for which the carnal man craves. And God invariably says with respect to this Isaac; "Take him, dear though he be, and offer him up in a place that I will show thee"—that place is Calvary.

But frequently this cherished will assumes some more special form; it appears as some particular disposition or tendency of nature; there is some pleasure in which your tastes lead you to indulge, some unholy employment which mere avarice induces you to continue, some bad companion whose image has crept into your heart. Or it may be that some object, good in itself, stands between you and your God—between your love and your duty. In any one of these cases there must be no reserve; a substitute will not do; not all your wealth, nor all your blood, will satisfy God instead of that delight; you cannot induce Him to alter His choice; His very object is to try your faith by love; and therefore He selects this one joy and no other; He points to that alone: "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest."

And this trial is often heightened by God's selecting a particular mode of giving, as well as by his choosing a gift we prize. God not only demanded Isaac, but he also fixed upon the most trying process of surrender. "Give me thy son, and *offer him up*." Abraham knew what *that* meant. If Isaac had been sent like Ishmael into the wilderness, and there left to perish of thirst, still had it been a gift of the child to God. If Abra-

ham had put his son in such circumstances that death had been inevitable, if he had sent him on some fatal mission, or employed him on some dangerous enterprise, if he had set him to watch the flocks where he would be exposed to such attacks as those which David encountered from the lion and the bear, and if the Patriarch fully believed that Isaac would be slain in the execution of his orders, it would none the less have been an offer of his son to the Lord. But a mere gift was not all which God demanded; the means of bestowment were as essential as the gift itself. Abraham must sacrifice Isaac like a mere sheep on the altar.

How many pangs did that act require! Even the mere preparations demanded more than a martyr's fortitude. Imagine the father going to the side of Isaac's couch, breaking his gentle slumber, and summoning him to prepare for that fatal journey; watch him as he collects the wood for his child's funeral pile; trace him as with yearning fondness he gazes on his loved fellow traveller during the three days of his journey, and Isaac all the while wondering why that look was so frequent, so earnest, and so sad; behold the Patriarch as with Moriah in sight, he puts the sacrificial wood upon his son's shoulders (*Gen.* xxii. 6); for he himself is aged; he cannot carry it: else how willingly had he borne that fatal load, rather than see the youthful victim toiling up the mountain side, laden with the fuel which was to reduce the form which carried it into ashes. What, again, must have been his fearful suffering when he took the fire in his hand, and felt the heat which

was in a few hours to consume the precious limbs of the dear youth at his side? And the knife! How his whole frame must have shuddered at its touch! Each act was a whole furnace of trial.

Knife and fire! Just the two things from which affection most abhorrently recoils. So fearful in their operation! So violent in their work! So terrible for memory to dwell upon.

It is related of an ancient painter that he once chose for his subject the sacrifice of Iphigenia by her father, and over Agamemnon's face he painted a veil, thus rendering the features invisible. The artist's friends remonstrated on this singular omission. "You have obscured," said they, "the chief personage in your group; you have concealed the father." "Ah," said the painter, "I could not describe *his* features;" and so he thought the veil more significant than any impotent attempt to depict agony, which no canvass nor words can convey. We must adopt the same wise plan; silence is the best comment on the anguish of Abraham; the heart alone can paint it.

But, however painful the operation which God selects, we must adopt it; for to change the mode of sacrifice, or to murmur at it, is just as much a proof of deficient faith, as to withhold the object. Alas! This impatience of the Lord's mode of trial is all but universal. We seem contented with submitting to the bare loss of some treasure, and appear to think this meagre submission entitles us to find fault with the way in which that loss befel us. The merchant does not pine under his ruin, but impatience overmasters him when he thinks of the

fact that a son's extravagance, or a friend's treachery was the agency which God permitted ; if only he had miscalculated his expenses, overrated his profits, or been defrauded by strangers, and thus being ruined, he could have submitted ; at least he thinks he could. The parent loses his child ; perhaps the stroke fell upon him with appalling suddenness, or the visitation was attended with severe pain, and long continued struggles with death ; he fancied that he could have given up his boy in any other way without a murmur ; if only time to say farewell had been granted, or if he had seen his darling sink into death as into a calm and painless sleep, he could have said, "Thy will be done ;" but oh ! that violent wrenching apart of soul and body, that pillow unwatched and unsmoothed, that far distant grave unwatered by a tear, untold by an epitaph, or unadorned by a flower ; these are the food on which a murmuring spirit feeds ; these are the excuses to which want of submission clings. Or perhaps the sacrificed Isaac may be of quite a different kind ; some privilege is taken away, some means of usefulness removed, and it is possible that all this may have been brought about by the authority of those dear to you ; they care not for religion, they are taken up with business, they compel you, as far as possible, to relinquish what they call your weakness and absurdity, and since you will not go with them to the same excess of riot and worldliness, they throw every obstacle they can in the way of your progress ; the taunt, the sneer, the profane jest, and the positive prohibition are all tried in turn ; your heart is almost broken as it views such barriers reared by such

hands. Oh ! if the sword were to be the instrument which cut you and your privileges asunder ; if a dungeon were to shut you out from your means of grace, instead of that parlour and that circle of loved hearts which like a chain surround you ; if the edicts of some bloodthirsty ruler or some savage council were to utter your sentence of banishment from your means of grace, and not those words spoken by lips which have kissed you, and by tongues which have soothed you even when a babe, then you could bear your sad lot. All this is wrong ; our faith is seriously defective ; we have not learnt to say, "Thy will be done," until we can give not only *what* the Lord wills, but *as* the Lord wills. Jacob must learn not only to weep for Joseph as dead, but calmly to look on that coat stained with the supposed blood of his darling, and rent by the fangs of the wild beast ; David must learn not only to bear Absalom's death, but even submissively to remember him as hanged by the locks he had so often parted on his boy's forehead, and pierced by the spear of his own general ; Abraham must learn not only to take Isaac, but also to offer him up ; we all must learn not only to hold our sweetest and loveliest flower at our Lord's disposal, but also to bear up against any way of taking which God chooses ; the flower may droop in bud or bloom ; it may hang its head lower and lower as you in anguish watch it pine daily away ; it may be suddenly breathed upon by some pestilential wind, or eaten by blight, or struck down by the storm ; in any case your language must be the same, "Not what I will, but what thou wilt—yea, *as* thou wilt,

how thou wilt, *when* thou wilt—Father, thy will be wholly done.” Oh! when will this holy consummation of faith be reached? When will this entire repose of soul be attained? When will this restless heart cease to strive after its own discomfort and misery? Not till we have spiritually learnt of the agonized Sufferer in Gethsemane; not till his Spirit be poured upon us from on high: for past failures have taught us that no power of mind or body can tutor the heart into submission, no force nor persuasion can keep down those rebel murmurings; in fine, nought can mould us into the Lord’s will but the Lord’s Spirit within us.

CHAPTER VIII.

FAITH OPPOSING AFFECTION.

ONE half of the Patriarch's sacrifice is frequently forgotten—men see the father surrendering the son, but they overlook the husband giving up the wife; they do not remember that the same weapon which slew the child would inevitably divide asunder the parents. Abraham was called to pierce one heart and break another; and the same blow would certainly do both. How could Sarah survive Isaac's death stroke? True, the son was to rise from the dead, (as Abraham supposed,) but alas! Sarah might be gone before that time; or fearful upbraidings might long before have ended in the mother's abhorrence of her babe's slayer. Such miserable results must have forced themselves on Abraham's mind, unless we suppose what is contrary to Scripture—that he was not a man of like passions as we are. At the very least this sad consequence was possible, and the husband's heart would not be slow to suggest it. "What will become of Sarah? What will she do? What will she say? I must not only offer up my Isaac, but possibly and probably I may have to go back and tell her this incredible tale—this tale of blood; I must prepare to lose or estrange my Sarah—Sarah endeared to me more than ever as the mother of my boy."

Next to Isaac, Sarah was necessarily the first person of whom the Patriarch would think ; next to the act of sacrifice there could be no act more trying than the fearful meeting with his wife upon his return.

At the moment Abraham was journeying to Moriah she was perhaps doubtfully pondering what could be the object of so sudden and mysterious a journey ; but never dreaming that her husband was leading her boy like a lamb to the slaughter. I take it for granted she knew not Abraham's purpose, otherwise she would inevitably have accompanied him. This is the very least she would have done. The son going to die, and the doting mother staying at home ! Three days—the last three days—of her darling's life spent away from her ! Nay ! it is impossible ; she must have gone ; she must have lingered about him to the last. There was nothing in the command to deter her, and everything in her maternal heart to urge her on. Had Sarah known the intention of that journey she would never have allowed them to go without her ; she would never have said farewell at the tent door ; at least she would have gone as far as the young men went ; and the fact that she did not go proves to our mind she was ignorant of the whole transaction.

The probability is that the command was purposely kept from her, lest she, who had imperiously sent Ishmael away against her husband's wish, should now step in like a robbed lioness, snatching Isaac from his father's hands, and thus preventing obedience. Besides, the account tells us that God's purpose was to try Abraham—not Sarah—and therefore to him

alone was the afflicting command given, and from him alone was this sacrifice of faith required.

With Sarah in this state of unconsciousness, what a terrible awakening was before her ! Instead of that comfort which the wretched father would need, what a fearful scene awaited him on his return ! There stands the wife at the tent door, watching the distant hills from day to day ; and the husband sees her in anticipation as at last she recognizes the little group threading their way homewards ; he sees her as she gathers up the folds of her mantle, and hastens to meet him as fast as age will let her ; he sees her as she stops suddenly and looks, and looks again ; he reads her thoughts. “ Alone ! alone ! where is Isaac ? Why that sad, slow, palsied pace ? Why that pale, haggard, downcast look ? Have the wild beasts slain him ? Have robbers stolen him ? No ! it cannot be ! Thou art alive—thou his father and his protector—thou, over whose dead body alone the beast or the robber could touch him—thou art alive ; these young men are alive ; and all three without a wound. And my Isaac dead ! Impossible ! ”

And what could that father say ? Oh ! what agony to gasp forth “ The Lord bade me, and I did it.” Will Sarah believe it ? “ The Lord bade thee ! What an obvious falsehood ! God gave him thee with a solemn promise ! No ! in wrath thou hast slain him ; the arm of passion killed my Isaac—my son.” And what would Abraham be to her henceforth ? She would count him her boy’s murderer ; she would recoil from his touch ; she would shudder at his very approach.

And supposing Isaac were at length given back, would Sarah's love for Abraham recover from such a shock? Could she ever bear to be supported or fondled with that hand which had once been spotted with her Isaac's blood? Or suppose even she only discovers that Abraham ever *intended* to slay her son; and that he actually went to Moriah, kindled the fire, and held the knife, with this terrible purpose, what does our own experience tell us must have been the result? Ask the fond mother how she would have felt towards the man who *intended* to kill her boy? Reason might urge—"He would have mourned the sacrifice as much as thyself;" conscience might urge, "The Lord demanded the offering;" but it would require faith strong as Abraham's to overcome nature's strongest instinct and to resist her involuntary shrinkings from the father, as she thought of her darling's narrow escape. Abraham must have reckoned on this cost in any case—whether Isaac returned or not. The bare fact of his journey involved this penalty; and perhaps after all he was called not only to risk, but actually to pay it. One thing we know, and it is significant; the very next event related after the offer of Isaac, is the death of Sarah, and she was living apart from her husband at the time—he at Beersheba (*Gen.* xxii. 19) and she at Kijath Arba or Hebron (*Gen.* xxiii. 2). The Patriarch was not with his wife even whilst she was dying, though it seems highly improbable to suppose that he was not advertised of her danger. It was not till *after her decease* we are told, "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her" (*Gen.* xxiii. 3).

Who shall say but that this singular event was the sad sequel to Isaac's offer? Who shall say but that the Patriarch did, after all, sacrifice a victim on Moriah—the only difference being that this victim was not Isaac but Sarah, and that the mode of sacrifice was not the fire and the knife but the still more painful process of estrangement!

But in any case what a trial of the heart was here! We speak truth when we say that a large share of the Patriarch's sacrifice consisted in opposing, as well as surrendering, his affections—in wounding Sarah as well as killing Isaac.

God calls you frequently to thwart your heart, and to oppose things and persons you love. He does not always require you to give up the object; but he leaves it in your possession and bids you contend against it. You, perhaps, have wealth and honours and pleasures; the fascination of society surrounds you; the incense of love envelopes you; perhaps the idolatry of friends enshrines and enthrones you; you have many worldly attractions in your family, your station of society, your business; you cannot give them up—duty forbids you; and yet they tend to draw your heart from Christ, and tie it down to earth. What are you to do? You are to oppose their worldly influence; you are to struggle against the cords which would bind you; you are to treat them as so many Sarahs unnerving the arm and blunting the knife—Sarahs, who fain would keep your Isaac back—Sarahs to be opposed—not sacrificed. That sweet babe, that princely boy, that gentle girl, must not be discarded;

that lovely wife or noble husband is not to be divorced from our heart ; that brother, that sister, or friend, is not to be abandoned ; for it would be an excess the other way, if from loving him too much you were to cast him away from you as salt which has lost its savour. True, you are so far to give him up, that at any moment you may be prepared to render him into your Saviour's hands ; you are so far to sacrifice him as always to be standing, having your loins girt, quite ready when the summons comes to lead the dear son to Moriah, and there see him offered on the altar of death ; but still, so long as the Lord's will prolongs your possession of the treasure, you must not cast it aside as valueless, but on the contrary you must hold it as a most precious jewel in trust, and rendered still dearer than ever by your love for Him who committed it to your care. We are to discipline our affections, not by loving our friends less, but by loving our God more. Christ's question to Peter was not, " Lovest thou *these less* than me ? " but, " Lovest thou *me more* than these ? "

But though our affections do not require *lessening*, yet they do need *regulating*. They naturally crave licentious liberty ; they commit follies innumerable ; they run on like a watch without a hair-spring, or a clock without a pendulum, or a steam engine without a governor. Neither hair-spring, nor pendulum, nor governor will destroy the force of the machine, but it will regulate that force. Yet the carnal heart cannot endure this discipline ; it strains against the checks ; it must love like a wild untamed passion ; it will not

submit to government ; and thus it is that whilst earthly love is not to be extinguished or even dimmed, yet does its *rebel tendency* require opposition ; it must have all its idolatrous and meretricious ornaments stript off, and must be brought as an humble worshipper to Jesus' feet, clothed in pure white, and in its right mind.

Oh ! this is hard work ! To give up, with many, is an easier task than to oppose ! The foolish mother often finds it more accordant with her so-called love to pamper her child till indulgence ruins or kills it, than to thwart its inclinations ; in other words, she can more easily slay than oppose her darling. To abandon an appetite is less difficult than to restrain one ; to burn the flesh to death is less difficult than to mortify it ; to kill affection is not so hard as to check it. And to these acts, arduous as they are, you are called. You are to mortify the flesh, with the lusts thereof : your life is to be a struggle against things you love—such as your will, your tastes, and sometimes your very family. It matters not what the high thing is ; if it be a high thing, and if it exalt itself against Christ, then it may be child, or father, or house, or lands, it matters not, you must fight against it as a hostile stronghold ; you must contend against its influence ; you must never rest, till by constant opposition, in the strength of the Lord, you have brought it into captivity to the law of Christ.

Oh for grace to carry on this heart-struggle ! Oh for grace to follow it up to victory ! Oh for faith to look to the end ! Soon shall our trials cease—cease

in a world of love—no love to give up there ; no love to oppose there ; no Sarah to contend against there ; no Isaac to sacrifice there ; but Sarah and Isaac and all about us will be legitimate and holy objects of love, they will be so completely one with Christ, and shaped into His exact likeness, that in loving them we shall love Him.

But it is not enough to resist love's influence against God, nor will it suffice that it should lie passive and submissive beneath the Saviour's power ; but we must even strive to make it an active and influential agent in Christ's work of winning souls. Love must not be drummed out of the regiment as a vagabond sin, but it must be disciplined into "a good soldier of Jesus Christ,"—a recruiting sergeant for the Lord's army. Love must turn preacher, and "persuade men." I know not any other agent so consistent with the work to be performed, and so adapted to it. God is love ; who then so suitable an ambassador from God as love ? The message is infinite love ; who then so suitable a messenger as love ? The heart is to be touched—broken—melted ; what then so appropriate an instrument as love ? The Spirit is the great power which is to do the work ; and how completely does love harmonize with His character, and His operations ! how favourably must He regard such a sweet, congenial agency as love ! how willing must He be to sanctify and bless an instrumentality so accordant with "the mind of the Spirit !" Every "labour of love" is pre-eminently a labour of hope, and I cannot think of any work so promising as the Gospel, poured forth from the lips of love.

Oh ! that parents would think of this, and let their own warm language of affection teach their little ones those truths which they now leave too much to the school-master and the governess. Oh ! that we could see more of the husband's or the sister's tenderness spent in pleading for Christ, instead of being lavished on empty trifles. Oh ! that the Christian's affections were used in every case as magnets, drawing souls to the Saviour's cross. Then might we hope that our own hearts would no longer be shrines for idols, but, as it were, wombs and cradles for dear babes in Christ, and love would be their nursing mother.

CHAPTER IX.

FAITH DARING THE WORLD'S REPUTE.

WHAT will the servants of Abraham say? How will the Canaanite mock? Even if Isaac be restored, yet what will they say, should the *bare purpose* of that journey to Moriah ever transpire? And if the patriarch should return alone; what then? The very idolater would put Cain's brand upon him, and drive him forth as one of the most wretched murderers the world had ever seen; the servants of his household would leave him alone like an anathema—a cursed thing; he would at last be abandoned by wife, and stranger, and servant—a miserable exile in the midst of his shepherdless flocks and his rejected gold.

Secrecy was out of the question; for the two young men could testify, "We saw him go up with Isaac to Moriah, there to sacrifice, as he said; and he returned alone." And what can Abraham answer? He cannot tell a lie—nay, he cannot even be silent, for if his tongue moves not, there is speech, plain as words, in that pale grief-worn countenance, and that look of anguish. Silence of the lips were as bad—nay, worse than words.

And if, on the other hand, he told all; could men believe him? The deed was utterly against the principles of Abraham's profession. Even Moloch had not

required such a sacrifice, and Saturn would have been contented with an image of clay. And will the Patriarch declare that the God of all mercy—the God who, in this very particular of human sacrifice, had probably been held up by Abraham as a glorious contrast to the idols of Canaan*—will he declare that this God of life and love gave him an order to slay Isaac? Who will credit him? No one; the universal sentence would be that on some provocation the son was slaughtered. Some would say that the whole transaction, from the time of leaving his tent to the moment of pretended sacrifice, was one deep and treacherous scheme of vengeance; others, more charitable, would assert that Abraham started with another purpose, but the youth offended him on the road—perhaps would not carry the wood, or refused to catch the ram for an offering, or would not climb the mountain side—and the angry

* I know that attempts have been made to prove that the notion of human sacrifices took its origin in Abraham's sacrifice; but it is far more likely that as the carnal heart of man forgot the typical meaning which gave the sacrificial lamb its value in God's sight, so did he attempt to make the sacrifice in itself costly by substituting the precious blood of his own race for the blood of bullocks and rams. The custom of human offerings was therefore in all probability contemporaneous with the decline of faith, the prevalence of a material, instead of a typical, sacrifice, and a consequent effort to give additional value to the offering in itself. Doubtlessly there are evident traces in profane history of Abraham's offer of Isaac; such as the miraculous substitution of a fawn for Iphigenia at the moment her father was about to offer her up, and the somewhat similar case of Helena when the plague raged in Lacedæmonia. But such relics of the sacred story are manifestly most trifling, and wholly insufficient ground on which to build the fanciful and revolting notion, that human sacrifices originated in Abraham's act of faith.

father suddenly lifted the knife and slew him. The world would have shuddered at such a stretch of patriarchal power as this ; they would have shunned and scouted such an unnatural and vindictive parent. Canaanite, servant, and wife, had all joined in one shout of execration, " Shame on thee ! Shame on thee ! "

And what was worse than all besides, everything they said would appear so just : Abraham himself would have said the same of another ; he could not blame them for their reproaches. Just in proportion as love and piety abounded, so would deeper indignation be felt against the Patriarch ; frowns would gather thickest on those very faces he respected and loved the most ; affection would call him a monster, innocence would dread him as a terror, and piety would brand him as a traitor and a dishonour to God's cause ; parents would loathe him, children would shrink from him, and Christians would weep over him. Yet with the prospect of such general execration as this ; with the sure conviction that if once it spread, then not even the resurrection of Isaac could entirely remove it ; with the anticipation that his grey hairs would thus be brought down in shame as well as sorrow to the grave ; he could still bind Isaac, lay him on the altar, and offer him up.

What a difference between the Patriarch and many of us ! He had reproaches awaiting him of such a character as to make the firmest man stagger—reproaches founded on principles which were true in the general way, and only false in his special case ; and here are we hesitating at every step, however slight.

wondering and fearing what this friend, or that neighbour, may say. "How strange it will seem," is our excuse for omitting many a duty, and perpetrating many a sin. I have but to quote to you half-a-dozen opinions against your obedience to God ; I have but to show you that this or that act of discipleship will incur a laugh, or a sneer, or a curse, from your acquaintance, and you draw back ; I have but to prove that open profession of Christ will be followed by your being cast out from some privileged "Synagogue of Satan," and you timidly hide your Saviour, you content yourself with a hole and corner piety, your discipleship is only an invisible dress, you come to Jesus by night, the fear of man is your snare.

Abraham must have expected to draw down upon himself the reproaches even of those who loved God ; Melchisedec the priest, and Sarah the wife, and Eliezer the servant, would probably all unite in upbraiding him. And the name, too, how hard to hear—"Murderer !" Yet we shrink from the scoff even of the sinner ; we dread what even the Canaanite will say ; and the very utmost any one can say is to call us "saint" or "hypocrite." What a contrast ! Abraham obeyed in the very face of imputed crime ; we draw back from the mere shadow of a sneer. Fashion and opinion lead us into pleasures we know to be unlawful, and habits we feel to be sinful ; they drag us back when conscience urges us on, and urge us on when conscience bids us stop ; we do iniquity and we omit good, because the world would otherwise shake its finger at us. Oh ! what a power of fascination the world's smile

or frown possesses ! What a force for a mere shadow to wield ! What an influence for a mere look to exert ! Saviour, break the spell !

Yet do not suppose that the serious and kind opinion of friends, especially if they be pious friends, is to be esteemed for nought. It is only when it clashes with the known will of Christ we are to count it nothing worth ; it is only at our Redeemer's command, and for His sake, we are to brave it. "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, *for my sake.*" Causelessly to incur a sneer or a reproach is mere spiritual bravado ; it is just of the same character as Romish flagellation ; it is a morbid love of martyrdom. Wherever we see that intense and feverish longing after persecution, we generally find there is something wrong. The man is probably the victim of some unamiable and repulsive temper ; he is rash and ill judged in his conduct towards those about him ; his piety has a great deal more of monastic asceticism about it than of the genial influence of the Gospel ; harshness and ignorance are his failings, and he would fain put the shame which they bring to the account of Christ—he would fain interpret the reproach of his own faults into the reproach of the cross. The bearer of such persecution is far more culpable in God's sight, and brings far more dishonour on the Saviour's name, than the persecutor himself.

Never violate the slightest duty for man's opinion, but do everything short of that. Deny self ; suffer long and be kind ; behave not yourself unseemly ; seek

not your own ; be not easily provoked ; think no evil ; bear all things ; believe all things ; hope all things ; endure all things. " Let not your good be evil spoken of," if it be in your power to prevent it. But if, notwithstanding all your wisdom and gentleness, men still speak against you as evil-doers ; if they require the sacrifice of one jot or tittle of allegiance to Christ as the price of their good opinion ; then dare the world frown and sneer—yea, though that frown gather on a father's brow, and that sneer curl a brother's lip. If worldly reputation demand Isaac to be kept back, then Sarah, Melchisedec, Eliezer, and the Canaanite, must all be unheeded ; the wife may weep, the priest may excommunicate, the servant may insult, the heathen may mock ; it matters not ; the Lord hath spoken ; God's honour is better than man's ; obedience is better than the plaudits of myriads, and faith will choose the " better part."

The Christian is too apt to weigh the world's opinion by itself ; he forgets to put anything in the other scale against it ; what wonder then if it seem a dread and ponderous thing, ready to crush the victim on whom it falls ? But if, as the world piles reproaches and scorn into the one scale, the believer would only look to the other scale, and instead of struggling against the descending weight, would seek for those many counterpoises which God has provided, then that weight, balanced and nullified, would be all the same to us as though it were a feather. There is a smile—and true faith knows it—which can chase before it the frowns of millions ; there is a day at hand when the

poor outcast from men's opinion shall be loaded with honour, when the sinner's scoff which we endured for Christ shall be repeated, no longer as a taunt, but as an ascription of honour—no longer as a sign of contempt, but as a badge of distinction more glorious than any which even Gabriel wears. What will our neighbour's opinion seem then? what will the verdict of fashion be worth then? Just what it ought to seem now—comparatively nothing. Oh! let us pray for that power of calculation to “reckon,” as Paul did (*Rom.* viii. 18); let us never listen to a sneer or a reproach without putting Christ's “Well done” as a balance against it; let faith date forward her honours to eternity, and the scorn of men will soon not only lose its gigantic and fearful proportions, but will seem like a hand offering to us what appear to man like lumps of mire, but are really ingots of gold. The world's insult is but a curtain hung before our future gems and crowns; and frequently it occurs that just as we approach nearer to them, so is the curtain darker and thicker; but let faith be strong of sight, and that curtain, instead of hiding her future honours, shall be a mirror on which they are reflected, and a dark background throwing out their colours.

CHAPTER X.

PROMPT FAITH.

THE difference between an excuse and a reason is, that the former is the offspring of desire, the latter is the result of judgment; one is forced into being by self-justification, the other is deliberately conceived by conviction; one is a mere invention, the other is a discovery. Now Abraham had no reason for delay; yet had he many possible *excuses*. Why not take some days or at least some hours to make his preparations for almost a week's journey; food must be obtained, tents must be packed, wood must be hewn and arrangements must be made for so long an absence. Affection might have lingered over a thousand so-called necessities, and multiplied its preparations, in order to lengthen out the span of Isaac's life. The youth himself must be allowed time to get ready; and, above all, Sarah's mind must be prepared for his absence, or else what will she say to his sudden and mysterious journey? True, the servants may tell her, "He is gone to do sacrifice;" but will not her obvious answer be, "Why should he conceal such a deed from me? why should he so suddenly conceive such a purpose? why disappear like a thief in the night?" Surely the husband may spare her this woe! surely he may lull her suspicions by giving her a few days' warning that

He and Isaac are about to go and offer sacrifice in a place which God will show him, and thus reconcile her to the journey ! The heart might easily have seized on any or all these excuses to prolong the son's life, and defer the dreadful slaughter.

But Abraham rejected such pleas for delay as excuses and not reasons ; for whatever they might be in ordinary cases, yet was it clear that in his position every argument for postponing his journey was mere sophistry of the heart, because the command of God was precise as to time as well as act—"Take *now* thy son." That "*now*" would have made even Sarah's life and the existence of all the Patriarch's property improper motives for delay. He must go at once ; voices of the heart pleading for delay must all be answered by faith's constant echo of the Divine command, "Take *now* thy son ;" faith had but one course ; she must rise up "*early in the morning.*"

And to facilitate this immediate obedience, we find the Patriarch using the most simple preparations, and actually sharing in the labour of making them. With servants in abundance, he yet saddles the ass with his own hands ; he then takes Isaac and two young men, and the four cleave the wood—*i. e.* the dry fuel which it was necessary to carry with them in order to kindle the damp wood they might find near the place of sacrifice. There is nothing superfluous—nothing to delay them before, or on their journey. The consequence of an Eastern chief is put aside ; he just takes sufficient attendants to protect an aged man and a youthful son through a lonely and lawless land. There is no attempt

at delay ; no cumbersome luggage to protract his journey : no plan to obtain even a moment's reprieve. Every action speaks alacrity ; every arrangement shows a desire to obey at once ; every detail was evidently contrived in the ready spirit which would not allow Abraham even the rational indulgence of prolonged slumber before a long and harassing march, but roused him from his sleep, urged him from his couch, and made him rise up and saddle his ass " early in the morning."

A tardy and hesitating commencement of Christian duty is so utterly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel that the bare existence of reluctance is a just cause for doubting the genuineness of our faith. One of the most hopeless forms which ungodliness takes is the pseudo-obedience of unbelief, and fear, and hesitation. Such obedience, we know, is farther from the obedience of faith than is disobedience itself ; for the heart is thus doubly armed against the truth—once by its carnality, and again by covering and cloaking that carnality with the truth's semblance. Oh ! this name to live while we are dead is one of the strongest bolts which Satan ever forged, and riveted on the door of the sepulchre where the spiritual dead are entombed. Unwillingness is just the characteristic of this most hopeless of all states. Delay is peculiarly the attribute of perdition ; hecatombs of souls have been sacrificed on the altar of " To-morrow ;" one epitaph may be written over millions of lost spirits, " They died of purposes deferred." Let us then beware of hesitation ; let us distrust all obedience which is not prompt and ready ; for whilst

delay may occasionally be found where true faith is, yet is it like a dark sin upon a holy life ; it is the bar sinister on our shield, declaring bastard blood in our veins ; it is like mistletoe on the oak—a monster—a parasite—a poison. A dilatory Christian is a most suspicious character ; he is a libel on the Spirit's energy, and a living satire on the "*powers* of the world to come."

And even where the obedience is not counterfeit, yet does a reluctant start often end in a series of most calamitous and rebellious consequences. How fearful was the result of that lingering spirit which Lot and his family showed, when commanded to leave Sodom ! It appears that they would not quit the city till the angels "laid hold upon his hand and the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters ;" the account is most particular in showing you the reluctance of each of them ; it would not do to take hold of the wife's hand, or Lot's hand, and leave the rest to follow, for they each required separate and distinct force : they each showed a tardy and reluctant submission. Oh ! you might have prophesied the result as you saw those two groups—an angel in the midst pressing forward with all the alacrity of his holy nature, and on each side of him an unwilling loiterer, hanging back, straining on the kind arm which held him, and evidently dragged, rather than led, without the city. How could such a commencement end well ? First of all, the wife fell a victim to this hesitation. She was still going forward, but there was disaffection in every pace ; every step was but the beat of some

machine driven by mechanical power in spite of its own inertia. Such a forced march was sure to end in a full stop. She could not persevere with so heavy a load of unwillingness to press her down, and so strong a force of magnetism to draw her back ; but there she stands a buried monument under the dead waters of Sodom's sea, and every wave which washes over her bears on its bosom a warning to all generations against reluctant obedience to God's command. The same spirit of hesitation still followed Lot to Zoar ; the same unbelief which made him linger in Sodom now made him doubt the Divine word—"I will *not* overthrow *this* city"—and we are told that Lot "feared to dwell in Zoar." The lingering and the fear may seem to be opposite faults—clinging to Sodom and fleeing precipitately from Zoar may appear contrary actions—but they are twin transgressions after all ; their origin is the same ; they both spring from that impromptitude and sluggishness of heart, which will not act implicitly on the Divine word. And what was the result of Lot's unbelieving flight from Zoar ? It was more horrible than his wife's sudden petrification into a pillar of salt ; it was such that he must have wished his daughters had rather perished in the flames of Sodom than have followed his laggard feet to Zoar ; it was such that the curtain of inspired history falls like a sudden and gloomy cloud over Lot's after life ; we hear no more of him. Hesitation led the miserable man onwards from disobedience to disobedience, till it plunged him in a gulf so horrible that the eye dares not follow him. A broken heart was probably the speedy consequence ;

for how could a father and a Christian ever lift his head again after such a frightful and sin-wrought calamity?

What a complete contrast to his nephew did Abraham present! Without an excuse or an expostulation—without an angel to drag him forth, or threatened destruction to quicken his steps—with death *before* him threatening him back, and not *behind* him pushing him on—the Patriarch could still set out with all the alacrity of a man about to meet an Isaac instead of to slay one; he could rise early in the morning and saddle his ass, and take two of the young men with him, and Isaac his son, and cleave the wood for a burnt offering, and rise up, and go to the place of which God had told him (*Gen.* xxii. 3). He made haste and delayed not to keep the Lord's commandment (*Psalms* cxix. 60). The result was certain—he consummated obedience.

But even where impromptitude does not lead to varied disobediences, as in Lot's case, still does it often cling to that particular duty in the performance of which it first showed itself. It was so with Peter. The Lord had commanded him to "kill and eat," but he demurred at the Divine order; "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." At last, however, after three descents of the heavenly vision, the Apostle's tardy will was quickened into obedience, he subdued his Jewish prejudices, and went with the men whom the Gentile Centurion had sent. But mark the distant result of that first hesitation! Upwards of fourteen years after, there existed the same hesitation on the same point; precisely the same spirit

which had uttered those words, "Not so, Lord," still lingered in Peter's heart; still did his first sluggishness of faith and obedience cling to him, and it received from the lips of a younger and later apostle the rebuke it so well deserved (*Gal. ii. 11-14*). A feeble start is at best a sad after hinderance.

Oh! there is a force in prompt obedience which completely baffles the enemy of souls; he has no time to manufacture snares; he has no opportunity of throwing down stumbling-blocks before you; but there you are in possession, so to speak, of the heights, and too firm and strongly entrenched for him to disturb your position. Promptitude is the very stratagem Satan employs so successfully against us; he anticipates our obedience with his rebellious suggestions; he is throwing up barricades before us while we are questioning whether we will go forward or not. Alacrity is thus the very weapon specially adapted to foil him.

History tells us that promptness and rapidity of movement were the keys to Napoleon's most splendid victories; he no sooner conceived a plan of campaign, than his whole army was in swift march to execute it; his adversary's outposts, driven in by what appeared to them a mysterious and omnipresent antagonist—his artillery, flashing and booming from heights which the foe thought it useless and absurd to occupy—these were the couriers who made the first announcement of his approach to the enemy. At times this prompt appearance in the field served of itself to force the opposing army into a hasty and full retreat; and if

this effect did not follow, then did the conqueror's columns move with the same swiftness to the attack as they had shown on their march, and they fell upon the surprised and panic-struck foe as though they had been transformed into a literal "thunderbolt of war," hurled by a second Mars. And why may not we use the same tactics in spiritual warfare with the same success? "Because," say you, "the enemy we have to deal with is not so easily taken by surprise; because he is ever on the alert." Very true; yet Satan is not omniscient; he does not know so much as the believer knows of what the Spirit teaches us to do; he cannot foretell anything we are about to perform;* he has no foreknowledge; and therefore it is possible to anticipate and forestall him—it is possible to take him by surprise. We often overrate the tempter's powers; we ascribe to him an influence which involves omnipresence, omniscience, and almost omnipotence. Yet it is no such thing; he is a mere creature of God, and not a rival potentate; he is a being whose power even as an angel is so injured by his fall, and so deteriorated below that possessed by those heavenly spirits who were once his fellows, that when at last he shall be "bound" and "cast into the bottomless pit," and "shut up," and "a seal set upon him," it is as

* The plans of Satan evidently prove great cunning and intimate knowledge of our state and disposition; yet as clearly do they exhibit a total absence of foreknowledge. If he could have foretold the result, do you think he would have been so senseless as to put his hand upon Job's property and person, or to tempt Christ, or to send the messenger to buffet Paul? Either Satan is a designing and purposed suicide, or he has no foreknowledge.

angel—his former equal—who shall come down from heaven and deal with this archpower of hell as though he were a mere noxious worm (*Rev.* xx. 1-3). True, it is folly to underrate the enemy's influence, but it is unbelief to over estimate it; it is false security to minify satanic strength, but it is bastard fear to magnify it. We must reckon it at what it really is—very strong compared with our own force, and yet less than nothing and altogether vanity compared with the might of the Spirit in us. In fact, we must not esteem the Tempter that power we have often thought him; we must not reckon him as second in might only to God; but we must feel the sweet influence of the truth that there is not an angel sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation, but he is more than Satan's equal—yea, we must know from daily proofs, that the weakest servant of Christ, animated with his Lord's omniscient and omnipresent Spirit, is a match for man's arch-enemy in skill as well as power, and that if only we use our infinite resources promptly and fully, we may, and we shall, outmanœuvre the foe, and come upon him like a swift army on an unprepared opponent. Promptitude is force, even against Satan.

And this fact of Satanic promptness to occupy ground in our advance, and stud it with pits and obstructions unless we anticipate him—this fact at once explains to us the seeming paradox, that whilst a sluggish Christian goes over less ground than his active brother, yet must he use more exertion to make even this smaller amount of progress. It is a perfect fallacy to believe that spiritual sloth is spiritual ease;

for, little though a sluggard does, yet he does that little under such fearful disadvantages, that a prompt and willing heart might do thrice the work with half the labour. "The path of a slothful man is as an hedge of thorns"—hedge and thorns too—difficulty and pain too. He cannot move onwards but a thousand brambles twine round him, and before him ; he cannot stir but a thousand points pierce him. And then, wounded and torn, he wonders how such ways as he is treading can be called, "ways of pleasantness" and "paths of peace." No ! he may walk God's ways, but he does not walk them as God has told him ; he adopts his own will as to the mode, and the Divine will as to the matter, of obedience. What must be the result of such a selfish combination ? There is pain in every movement ; every step is a sorrow ; impromptitude has put a thorn in the foot of obedience ; she limps—she smarts.

But one warning must we add, lest some self-accusing Christian may confound this impromptitude with that struggle between the flesh and spirit which frequently precedes any arduous act of duty. God did not intend your victory to be without conflict ; the history of your triumph is not that of Cæsar—" *Veni, vidi, vici* "—"I came, I saw, I conquered ;" but you will be made perfect "after ye have suffered awhile" (1 *Pet.* v. 10) ; your progress is not an immediate transition from putting on the armour to putting on the crown. Yet still promptness may be displayed in the attack, if not in the victory ; you may, and must, lose no time in grappling with sin, though it may be

years before Satan is completely bruised under your feet. Warfare, then, there must be ; but it must be the warfare of a willing spirit against the unwilling flesh ; it must be that prompt and vigorous resistance which the renewed heart offers to the lusts within and the powers without which seek to enslave it.

No careful examiner will confuse together this struggle and that of reluctance ; no heart which is not morbidly bent on writing bitter things against itself, but will perceive the difference. The ready believer struggles to submit, the unwilling soul struggles to escape ; the one seeks to pillow his throbbing heart on his Father's love, while the world is dragging him back, the other seeks to soothe his anxiety with earth's narcotics, while God is rousing him from sleep. The two processes are entirely the reverse ; one is the will tending to God, yet distracted by cares ; the other is the will tending to earth, yet distracted by fears of God. In the one case the eagle sees the sun, and longs to break its chain and soar away to heaven ; in the other case the bird, like an owl, loves the darkness, and only frets against its chain to escape the light, and seek its black and gloomy nest. The will rests on opposite objects, the struggle is made for opposite ends. Thus there may be a conflict in the Christian's soul, and yet his obedience may be filial and ready ; his will may at once respond to his Father's call. Even Abraham did not complete the required sacrifice at once ; there was a three days' conflict to intervene ; and when he rose early, it was not to consummate victory at a stroke, but to commence that series of struggles which could

only end at the far distant Mount of Moriah. Alacrity is therefore seen, not in a speedy triumph, but in a prompt declaration of war, and an immediate march to the scene of action. The time of victory is in the Lord's hands—we know it not ; but the time for taking the field is always the same—it is NOW ; the moment of actual sacrifice is fixed when and where God shall please, but the time of starting is settled beyond the reach of alteration—it is “EARLY IN THE MORNING.” Lord ! quicken my drowsy heart ! fledge my faith with the “wings of the morning.”

CHAPTER XI.

DELIBERATE FAITH.

THERE is a haste which is rashness ; fitful and ungovernable impulse is its cause, and not the energetic action of a renewed judgment ; it is palpitating with fear, and hurries along trembling, or else it is replete with passionate excitement, and recklessly overturns everything in its way ; it cannot sustain its speed, but is soon out of breath, and first pants, then stops ; it has not set before itself a definite end, but runs like a man running away from some object he fears or hates, and not like a racer pressing towards a prize.

But true diligence begins her work by earnest inquiry ; she first looks, and then runs ; she first prepares, and then sets out ; neither is her course, when commenced, like an arrow from a bow—slower and slower, as she goes on, but it is like iron attracted towards a loadstone—faster and faster as she approaches it. She does not move like some showy ensign on a flagstaff—flapping and waving in all directions, yet always confined to one point—but like the sails of some gallant ship, she catches and keeps the wind, her canvass filled with the heavenly breeze, and pressing onwards towards port. She has an eagle's eye and an eagle's wing—looking and soaring to the sun—and not a swallow's uncertain flight, now skim-

ming the water, now gliding along the ground, now circling in the air, and yet never flying towards a given point. The desire of true diligence is, not motion, but motion towards an object ; she runs, looking to Jesus ; she presses to the mark.

First of all, deliberation is needed to ascertain the fact and the genuineness of the Divine command ; for until that is known, true faith can do nothing. Abraham was sure of this fact at once, but, as we have seen, it is different with us, and often much doubt surrounds the question. Diligence, therefore, begins by seeking Divine illumination ; for no time is gained which is gained at the expense of God's teaching—no time is wasted which is spent in supplication of the Spirit.

Yet there must be no manufacture of doubts for the sake of waiting to have them removed ; there must be no halting of unbelief after the Lord has uttered a reply quite clear and definite enough for a ready faith to hear. It is only so long as the soul is willing and listening—ready to catch the first intimation of the Divine will, and eager to obtain a settlement of its doubts—it is only so long that we should continue to inquire, “ Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? ” Prolong the inquiry, and you trifle with God ; go before you have made it, and your departure will be like that of a messenger with half a message—you will have to come back again, learn more perfectly your errand, and start afresh. In fine, your questions must be like those of the child who has lost its way, and pants for home—not like those of the sluggard, who, when he is called, still lies rubbing his eyes, and asking a score of inquiries as to

time, and weather, and temperature, just to delay the act of rising, and, if possible, to discover an excuse for further sleep.

And then, while this earnest and sincere inquiry of the Lord is going on, and we are learning what we knew not, a second purpose will be attained ; we shall be strengthened as well as taught ; the answer to our prayer for teaching will include might as well as instruction ; the Lord will add power to knowledge ; the Spirit will at the same time mark out our road, and prepare us for it. God never teaches like man ; He never lays before a soul a chart of its voyage, and says, "that is your course, go, take it ;" but whilst He draws out before us the plan of our journey, He at the same moment prepares us with staff, and scrip, and shoes, and then leads us along the road He has marked down ; the hand which points us onward is full of offered grace ; the revelation of the Lord's *will*, and that of the Lord's *arm* always go together. It is, indisputably, the language of unbelief, which asserts, "I know it is my duty, but I want the courage ; I am convinced of God's will, yet I lack strength of heart ;" for conviction and needful grace are twin gifts—brought forth by mercy at one birth ; true faith ought, therefore, to open her mouth when she opens her ears, and thus imbibe power at the same time that she learns her appointed work.

Yet still there are many cases where physical impossibilities stand in our way ; our bodily, intellectual, or social resources may not be equal to the act which our soul is ready and eager to perform. It is clear

that the moment of obedience has not come ; " the vision is yet for an appointed time." Now this is just the position in which the deliberate character of our faith is specially tried ; opportunity is given to look around, and weigh well the cost of our sacrifice ; the first heat of excitement is cooled down ; impulse is slain ; and if there be nothing better to support our obedience than an outburst of enthusiasm, this interval for calm reflection will prove fatal to it. Jehus cannot wait ; stop their furious driving, and you stop them altogether ; they are only fit for a sudden and short-lived exploit ; they merely possess that evanescent courage which can make a brilliant charge, but which soon evaporates when it is ordered to stand under arms, enduring the enemy's fire, and waiting the right moment of advance. Christian soldiership consists of combined discipline and energy ; it is seen in restraint as well as action ; it at once repudiates shrinking cowardice and that fierce impetuosity which often contains as much disobedience as does cowardice itself ; it at once condemns the rash Apostle as he cuts off the ear of Malchus, and the timid Apostle as he denies his Master. True obedience does the Lord's will at the Lord's time ; it is neither before nor after ; it is neither rash nor slow.

But what has all this to do with Abraham's example ? he did not tarry, but set out almost immediately ; two or three hours after the vision he was on his way. Yet, notwithstanding this early start, the deliberate character of the Patriarch's faith was most thoroughly tested by the three days' journey to Moriah. It had

been comparatively easy for him to leave his couch under the immediate influence of the vision, rouse Isaac from his bed, take him to some neighbouring hill, and there sacrifice him before morning had dawned. But God required him to be a burning and shining light, and not a mere flashing meteor ; He resolved to expose the flame to rough winds, and to sustain combustion, in order to give us an example of that holy fire kindled by the Spirit, which no wind can blow out, and no time can burn out. At first the full extent of Isaac's loss might not present itself to Abraham's mind. He was, probably, carried beyond himself by the abundance of the revelation given unto him. He had seen and heard God. Like Paul, he must have scarcely known whether he was in the body or out of the body. Under such an influence, any act had been easy. But neither in the case of the Apostle, nor in that of the Patriarch, would the Lord permit his work to be done thus. He brings down Paul from his entrancement by a thorn in the flesh ; by protracted pain he reduces him to a level with his fellow Christians, lest he should be exalted above measure, be prompted to his work by enthusiasm rather than by steadfast faith, and appear to after ages as a mere excited enthusiast—a man in the clouds—rather than a calm, patient, practical, and every-day Christian. And what the thorn was to Paul, the three days' journey was to Abraham. The first excitement of the Lord's sudden appearance to him was cooled down ; his obedience was clearly not the result of entrancement ; he could stand, as it were, calmly in God's presence for three long days, holding

Isaac in his extended and untired arms for the Lord to take him when He chose.

And then this period of suspense served not only to try the real and enduring character of Abraham's faith; but it also gave time for that necessary and painful work of counting the cost. He had leisure to weigh his deep affection for Isaac, and to look again and again upon his precious son with somewhat the same kind of sadness with which a parent looks on the features of her dead child, just before the funeral train sets out to lay her darling in the grave; he had opportunity to think long and sadly of Sarah, and to picture the desolation of his childless home; he had time to anticipate the united censures of wife and stranger, servant and Canaanite, saint and sinner. In fact, he had time to estimate what the Lord's will really was in all its extent and consequences, and thus to obey God with his eyes open.

The Saviour is not contented that HE should know the value of what he asks; WE must know it too. Christ will have an intelligent surrender of all you have. You must reckon what you give to him, not with a purse-proud spirit, but with the steady purpose of a man who makes over all his property to another, and numbers up pounds, and fields, and houses, to see that nothing is wanting. All things are to be loss for Christ's sake, but they are to be "*counted*" loss; it is not a mere hyperbolic expression, but the calm result of spiritual calculation. The columns of profit and loss are put together; they are compared; a balance is struck; and the believer then "*reckons*,"

and finds "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed." It is true, that in all cases where the soul has learnt its arithmetic from the Spirit, the result will be invariably the same—the loss will be found inconceivably small, and infinitely out-balanced by the gain; yet small as that loss is, Christ will have it from you, not as a blind offering, but as a spontaneous and intelligent gift. It is nothing in favour of a man's charity when he takes a coin from his purse and gives it away, utterly ignorant whether it is a sovereign or a farthing: but it is the charity of the Gospel when he weighs the sovereign, and knows it to be such, and yet bestows it, as a thing nothing worth—a mere farthing. Go, then, and count the cost of your Christian profession. Humbly reckon the sufferings you must endure for Christ. You are less likely to omit any sacrifice he requires, for selfishness always shelters itself under generalities; it never reduces its gifts to figures. Take into the account this gain relinquished, that companionship given up, this hope abandoned, and that pleasure denied. Take your Isaac to Christ, full well knowing it is your very son Isaac, and what a son he is; give him freely, estimate him as loss for Christ's sake, give him entirely and cheerfully; at once incur the cost with all your heart, and "count" it too; count it calmly, and thus "sit down" to do it (*Luke* xiv. 28, 31); count it promptly, and thus "rise early" to your work.

You are not, however, to sit down and dream of every little difficulty which may or may not occur—

you are not to give the reins to imagination and fear, and bid them conjure up every possible and impossible danger of the future ; but you are calmly to weigh probabilities, and deliberately arm yourself with such a store of grace that you may "fear no evil." Sorrows may strew the path of obedience—sorrows which *must be*, you are bound to expect and prepare against ; sorrows, also, which are *likely* must enter into your calculations ; but sorrows which are *barely possible, and no more*, need not assume distinct form, but may safely be left to be provided against by that general supply of spiritual might, which, like a powerful army of reserve, watches the conflict, ready to throw itself with overwhelming force on any point unexpectedly assailed.

Thus prepared by earnest inquiry, imparted grace, patience, and a foresight of sorrows, our obedience will not be that hybrid monster of a day, begotten from the adulterous union of so-called religion with excitement or fear ; but it will be the calm, holy, long-lived offspring of the Spirit—obedience which can rise with the lark, and like a bird of passage on its migration, continue on the wing till the distant clime is reached—obedience so unchangeable, that even were it three years instead of three days, or three centuries instead of three years, still would God's true servant bend his willing steps to the distant Moriah, and at last take the knife to consummate the act with as much holy strength of purpose as if he had rushed from the scene of the night vision to the place of sacrifice.

CHAPTER XII.

FAITH CLEARING THE WAY OF EXPECTED OBSTACLES.

IT is not enough to foresee a difficulty, or to blunder onwards, encountering hinderances *as they come*, but, so far as we can, we must *previously* remove out of our path everything which may impede or stop us. Many obstacles are insurmountable and fatal when discovered *after they are reached*, and yet are mere trifles if seen and provided against *at a distance*. How easy for a general to dislodge the mere handful of enemies which lie in yonder wood in ambush ; yet let him march his whole force past the ambuscade, and only take measures against it when his army is attacked, then are his troops thrown into most serious confusion, and perhaps driven back panic stricken. The traveller across the desert may easily guard against the drought of his journey beforehand ; he has nothing to do but to fill his water skin, and sling it across his shoulders ; but if he delays preparation till the moment of thirst, what agonies—perhaps agonies even to death—does it entail ! A pebble heedlessly left in your path may grow into a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, by the time you reach it. The young Christian may easily give up a bad habit, or a vicious companion, at first ; he may, without much effort, tear out

the weeds when the ground is newly turned up and loosened ; but if he waits till some occasion when the power of that habit or companion is in actual operation against him, he will most certainly have a task inconceivably more difficult ; he will be like the florist who waits till the weed in very deed chokes and hustles his flower before he pulls it up—the ground will be hardened, the poisonous roots ramified in all directions, and the beauteous plant of grace injured by the rough process required for the eradication of its unnatural companion. Never let us leave one obstacle in our path for to-morrow's removal which we can remove to-day ; but wherever we see a distinct difficulty in the way of obedience, we must at once seek means and grace to overcome it, without giving it an opportunity of practically exerting its baneful influence upon us.

It is self-confidence, and not faith, which despises precaution, and expects no obstacle till it comes ; it is presumption, and not filial confidence, which will not anticipate the obstacles God has revealed, or use the means to overcome them which he has given. Faith trusts, but does not tempt, her Lord ; she leans upon Him, and goes where He leads, but she is not blind. A refusal to employ precautions against future difficulties is no more a proof of faith, than is a rejection of arms when you are about to attack a well-equipped enemy a proof of strength. The only thing proved in both cases is a combination of rashness and folly. True, David refused the helmet and the sword (for what would they have been but encumbrances to a shepherd !), yet at the same time he took the sling and the stones. We do not

honour the Spirit's power where we neglect the means which He Himself has provided ; but, on the contrary, we dictate to Him His mode of action, and deprive Him of His right to use what instrumentalities He pleases. A foresight of difficulty, and precaution against future obstacles, are as much the Spirit's work as is strength for the actual battle. What, if Abraham had not hewn the wood, or had left the fire or the knife at home, depending on the moment of sacrifice to provide him with these necessities ! Would that have been genuine faith ? Would you not have questioned his sincerity if the Bible had told us that he took Isaac to Moriah, and lo ! the wet wood of the mountain would not kindle ? Would you not have suspected an obedience which was arrested by the want of a knife or fire ? If Abraham had returned with an unslain Isaac on such grounds as these—if his excuse had been, "I bound the boy, yet had no knife to pierce him, no wood which would burn, or no fire to light the pile of sacrifice, and so I brought him back again,"—you would have refused to own him as an example of faith. Vain would have been the plea, "I depended on God to provide these instruments of death, and He did not choose to do so ;" your instant reply would have been, that God provided them before the Patriarch started ; there they were in and about his tent ; and none the less a Divine provision because they were supplied by ordinary means, and required to be carried to the place of sacrifice.

Another remarkable instance of this same careful forethought is seen when, at some distance from Moriah, Abraham stopped the servants who attended his

journey, and bade them "Abide here with the ass, and I and the lad will go yonder and worship." There was no other reason but that of an uninterrupted performance of his sad duty which induced the Patriarch to leave his attendants behind. A sacrifice was not a private act, but one in which all the household were allowed, and even expected, to unite. Neither did the ass require watching, for in every probability where they climbed, the ass could go too; there was no object in scaling the steep and precipitous parts of Moriah; and even if the animal must be left, yet surely a halter and a rope—and not two young men—would have been sufficient safeguard. It is clear that Abraham's purpose was to secure himself against the certain interference of these servants. Such a gentle and obedient boy as Isaac must have been loved dearly by the whole household, and do you think they would have stood quietly by while the cord was bound, and the knife uplifted? Not even the absolute and extensive reach of patriarchal power could have restrained them. Without having received a direct command from God to submit, there is not a single right minded man on earth who would, or could, or ought to, have quietly permitted such a deed to be done. They would certainly have interfered. Well! and if they did, was not Abraham's purpose of obedience perfect? Could he not have said, "I was quite willing, but they prevented me?" Now, the faith of excitement would have gone carelessly on, without any forethought or precaution against this obstacle; an apathetic faith would have proceeded to Moriah, and "allowed things to take their

course ; " a faith halting between two opinions would, in its heart, have courted such a mode of escape a mere professed faith would have taken witnesses, to parade its wonderful power, and at the same time to prevent its ending in anything but a noise and a show ; but true faith endeavoured, by every effort and precaution, to accomplish the command of God as zealously and really as the man of the world tries to compass some brilliant success in commerce. It was when Abraham saw Moriah " afar off " that he stopped the young men (*Gen.* xii. 4, 5), and there he left them ; no cry for help could reach them ; no curious eye could see him as he bound the lad ; no swift foot could hurry in time to prevent the act of sacrifice ; every obstacle was put where it ought to be—" afar off."

Oh ! what a contrary spirit often prevails among so called disciples of Christ, and professors of Abrahamic faith. Instead of the Patriarch's foresight and energy of purpose, they welcome difficulties as saviours from self-denial. They snatch at any obstruction, magnify it a thousand fold, esteem it an impassable barrier, and call it an interposition of Providence. The very slightest reason against their sacrifice is conclusive, and is quite sufficient in their minds to answer a hundred more powerful reasons in its favour. They long for some excuse to swerve from the path in which fear or self-interest has induced them professedly to walk. They need no lion in the way to stop them ; for insects by them are distorted into dragons, and mole-hills into mountains. Satan has no occasion to marshal a fiendish legion in their front, for they are ready to

multiply opposing *units* into thousands, and to magnify a mere snowball into an avalanche. Such obedience as this is only a mask for rebellion—a trick to deceive men and self too. It is utterly different from the obedience of faith; the two things are the very reverse of each other; they start from precisely opposite points; they regard the Lord's trying commands in directly contrary lights. False obedience looks on any required sacrifice as on a dark precipice, and catches at every stone and straw to prevent falling down it; true obedience regards it as a noble, though arduous, ascent, and she seizes on every projecting rock and branch to aid her upward progress. Counterfeit faith creates obstacles; true faith annihilates them; the one lays aside every weight which hinders her race, the other picks them up, and hugs them to her, as an excuse for not running.

Let us watch this faint and unarmed obedience in the actual—or rather, the fictitious—performance of some duty. Take, for instance, that of private or family prayer—an inestimable privilege and enjoyment to the Christian, yet often requiring some slight sacrifice of time and convenience to accomplish it. The difficulties in such a case are, in a general way, small, even to insignificance. But how does false obedience treat them? Yea, how does even true faith, when adulterated with worldly leaven,—how does even she treat them? Multitudes of trivial hinderances—hinderances we meet and overcome daily in business—hinderances which the hope of a mere shilling's profit disperses—these do we allow as valid excuses for

abridging or omitting our devotions. A secular engagement, which might just as well have been made at some other time, or not made at all—a little domestic inconvenience, which would not be felt by any one of our family after the first week—a cold morning—a dark morning—a little over-fatigue, incurred probably, in our search after pleasure—these are the excuses with which we bribe conscience to break even the least trying of God's commandments. Oh ! what then must be our short coming, and our yielding to difficulties, when the cross becomes heavier, and the duty of a more painful character ? “ If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses ; and if in the land of peace they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan ? ”

Go ! mistaken souls, and learn what the obedience of true faith really is ; learn how prepared she is for every opposition ; see how she provides against every hinderance ; watch how energetically she takes obstacles by the forelock, and, in the name and strength of God's Spirit, casts them out of her path. Your lagging faith had never thought of the dry wood, and lo ! the damp branches of Moriah would not have kindled ; this would have been your excuse, and you would have carried back your Isaac unoffered. You would have forgotten the fire or the knife, and thought you were thus justified in turning home again. You would have either overlooked, or perhaps desired, the presence of the young men, nor would they have needed any great expenditure of strength or persuasion to make you

abandon your purpose. In fine, you would have been a very contrast to Abraham, when, with resolute obedience, he left the young men behind, took the wood, the fire, and the knife, and proceeded to that which must have appeared the inevitable sacrifice of Isaac.

CHAPTER XIII.

ACTIVE FAITH.

THE son must be given—and something more—the father must be the *immediate* giver. There must be no medium of bestowment—no one to take the lad from his parent's hands and present him to God—no one employed to do the act of offering—no other party to the transaction than Abraham the slayer, Isaac the slain, and God the acceptor of the sacrifice. How hard would this part of the requirement have appeared to many of us! Weak faith would have called the suffering useless, and would at least have asked for some being—some priest—to take Isaac and offer him up. “Why should the parent's hands be imbrued in the child's blood! Why should the arm which had nursed the boy, be the very arm to lift the knife! Why not let another offer him! I will give him; I will lead him to the altar; but oh! require not more from me! Put not the knife or the fire in my hands! Behold a priest is even at hand! Why not send Melchisedec to me? he is thy priest; the office is peculiarly his; let the work be his; let him slay my Isaac.” No! Abraham, the Lord requires thy ACTIVE faith, therefore “Take the knife.”

There lies Salem where Melchisedec reigns; it is close at hand; it is in sight of Moriah—almost at its

very foot. There stand the young men ready to go for him. And Melchisedec would come—come quickly—at the urgent request of his friend Abraham. The result would be the same. Isaac would be sacrificed. Why not send for him? No, Abraham! The deed must be thine; the faith demanded must be *active*. Lift the knife.

But perhaps Melchisedec might have been unwilling; perhaps Abraham supposed that he would not slay Isaac even if he came; perhaps the expedient of sending for him was not open to the Patriarch. No! All this might have been easily obviated. Doubtlessly if no Divine intimation had been given, the priest would have refused; but supposing God had said to him as he said to the Patriarch, “Go and take Isaac; his father is willing and waiting to offer him;” or supposing simply that as he journeyed to Moriah, or when he came there, some sign had appeared to signify the Divine will in the matter; then all difficulty would have been removed. Surely if Abraham—the father—could bring the boy, Melchisedec could offer him.

How desirable such a plan must have appeared for many reasons! Melchisedec would share in the act; the priestly sacrificer would at once be a guarantee for the character of Isaac’s slaughter, and would in some measure silence the reproaches which such a deed would bring on the Patriarch. It would be evident to all, that the deed was done from religious motives. But no! All this alleviation must Abraham forego; his faith must be *active*—not passive—he must take the knife.

It is evident that an expedient could be found, and found easily, by which Abraham could give his son, and yet not be the actual slayer. But there is clearly a design on God's part to avoid the substitution of a priest for the Patriarch ; and this design was none other than that the father was required to show active faith—faith which can “*do*,” as well as *suffer*, “all things through Christ” which strengtheneth her—faith which can grasp the knife, even in that very hand which so often had caressed the dear boy—faith which can strike the blow with that very arm which had so often embraced Isaac—faith which could keep the eye from shutting and the brain from giddy reeling as the father took the fearful aim.

The disciples of Christ are not to be mere beasts of burden, just bearing submissively a load put upon them ; but they must often, at the Divine command, and depending on Divine grace, take the load on their shoulders themselves by some specific act : and when it is so taken, they must not be like mere stocks, just supporting the weight, but they must move and walk, yea—run, under it. Faith must be active. She must not wait till houses, and lands, and friends are wrenched out of her possession, but when the Saviour's cause requires it, she must forsake them ; she must become the agent in her worldly loss ; she must, so far as earth is concerned, be both ruiner and ruined. When our Redeemer represented to the apostles and to us how great things he would require from us—things useful to us as a right hand, supporting to us as a foot, and sensitive to the touch as an eye—how

are we to part with them ? Are we to wait till accident robs us of them, or till God takes them from us by some signal calamity ? No ! The deprivation is to be our own act ; *we* are to cut off the hand ; *we* are to pluck out the eye ; *we* are to amputate the foot. That sinful pleasure is not to be enjoyed as long as opportunity lasts, but we are to cut off opportunity ; that bad companion is not to be embraced so long as he clings to us, but we are to leave him ; the world and all its attractions are not to be our satisfaction till some stroke of Providence takes them away, or old age deprives them of relish, but now in the very hey-day of possession and enjoyment, we are to deny ourselves, we are to look away from the things which are seen and temporal, we are to hold lightly lawful objects, we are to renounce those which are unlawful, we are so to come out from among the fleeting shadows of time, that whilst in the world we are not of it. That Christian is sure to be a spiritual sluggard—a dishonour to his master—who esteems his duty to be *only* endurance. Faith is winged ; she flies. She is not an earth-worm—simply exhibiting life when trodden under foot and writhing beneath pressure. Faith is the crucifier, and not at all times the crucified ; she must *take* up her cross ; she must crucify the flesh. Faith must lay the axe at the root of every tree which yields forbidden fruit, and not wait till the wind and the torrent tear it up. She is not like an unwilling child who requires the mother to rise up out of her place and force the toy from his hand ; but she resembles the sweet and ready child, who, at a word,

catches up the forbidden plaything, and runs with outstretched arms to put it in the mother's lap. Thus, the believer must often be the executioner of his own joys—the slayer of his own Isaac.

But there must be no mere self-torture, for torture's sake ; none of those lashings, and horse hair shirts, or hot iron floor, or beds of thorns, or starving, which are often prescribed as trials of faith. Penance, unasked by your Saviour's cause or your own soul's welfare—penance, which begins and ends in a mere wail across the back, a blister on the foot, or a drop or two of blood—such penance is not an act of faith, but an act of pride, trying to win merit by doing more than God has commanded. Such excesses, though they may appear redundancies to man, are really spiritual deficiencies. If the wail or the trickling blood had been incurred in some earnest attempt to advance the cause of Christ and of souls, then had it been a sacrifice of faith ; but as it is, you have not waited for God's call, you have constituted yourself into a judge and an apportioner of your own afflictions ; you have not only slain "Isaac," but you have chosen what Isaac it shall be ; you have altogether departed from Scripture precedent and precept. Amongst all Paul's lashes, which was there inflicted by himself ? Amongst all his pains and distresses, which was there instigated by himself ? Amongst all his deprivations and losses, which was there which his Saviour's cause did not require ? Recollect that Christ's command is not "Cut off the right hand," but it is, "*if it offend thee, cut it off ;*" the offence is to be the cause of amputation, and

not the torture incurred in the process. There must be some Divine call before you act ; there must be sin in the object of expulsion, or there must be gain to Christ in its sacrifice ; there must be no idea of merit or superfluous suffering, or gratuitous and unasked misery. If you act on your own judgment and responsibility, you are a presumptuous tormentor ; your sacrifice has no relationship to that of Abraham, for if he had done as you do, he would have taken Isaac without any Divine command to Moriah, he would have slain him upon the altar, *he would have been a murderer.*

Faith, then, must not walk alone ; she must not mark out her own course ; her activity must be that of obedience, and not of independent and self-prescribed action. Her first inquiry must be, " Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? " and immediately she must set about doing it. There must be no lazy waiting till necessity drives her ; she must not be a mere sport of winds or toy of circumstances. That is a sort of passive obedience taught by the Koran rather than the Gospel ; it is a distinguishing trait of the Arab as he sits lost in apathy at his tent door, and waits till Allah and his prophet shall pronounce and inflict his doom ; it is a mark of the disciple of fate, and not of His disciple who has bidden us stand with our loins girt, our staves in our hands, and every sign of activity about soul and body too. We must be up and doing ; we must work. True, all must be done in the Lord's strength, but still it must be *done*, and done by you.

It would often be far easier if God were to remove

from you the desire of your heart, than require you to give it up ; it would be less painful for the wave to wash the lading of the vessel overboard, than for you to throw it with your own hands over the ship's side. But, though easier, it would not answer God's purpose so well ; it would not so effectually work your good. The manner of the loss is as useful to you as the loss ; it calls faith from mere passion into action. It may be very, very hard ; but no other course will do so well. Abraham must not remain weeping in his tent, and send Isaac with a priest to Moriah ; he must not idly stand by and let Melchisedec do the deed ; but his faith must act as well as suffer ; she must bind Isaac, she must lay him on the wood, she must lift the knife, and if not arrested by God, she must bury it in the heart of her treasure.

CHAPTER XIV.

PASSIVE FAITH.

WE are accustomed to measure agents by consequences ; and when we hear a loud sound we look for a large instrument. This habit has led us into a mistake of Abraham's case. We know that he led Isaac to the sacrifice as a priest leads a lamb ; and we therefore picture to ourselves a tall and commanding figure binding with main strength a mere child, who is pale with fear, and trembling beneath the manly vigour of the father's arm. Yet the scene would be far nearer the truth if you were just to reverse the case. There stands a weak and aged man, his form bent, and his hand trembling. And there, on the wood, lies a youth in all the bloom and power of bursting manhood, his age about twenty-five, his muscle developed, his form displaying all that wiry strength which ultimately endured the shocks of one hundred and eighty years. Why, Abraham would have shaken and staggered in such a grasp as Isaac's hand could give. A blow from the son's arm, and the father had rolled helplessly down the sides of Moriah. Not all the strength of Abraham could have overcome the slightest resistance of Isaac. And yet the athletic youth was bound ; how could it be done ? The strong man is laid upon the wood like a powerless lamb by the

shrunken arm of age ; how could it be done ? There is but one answer to the question—Isaac must have been a consenting party to his own sacrifice ; he must have put that firm confidence in his father's love that he was quite sure the act wounded the slayer far deeper than the slain, and that Abraham would not—could not—have offered his dear and only child unless the Lord had commanded ; he must have put such trust in God's wisdom that he was quite certain the Lord would not demand his death excepting for a purpose of love and mercy. The strong man therefore submitted to the arm of age and infirmity ; he must even have assisted to put himself upon the altar, for how could Abraham lift him ? he must have allowed coil after coil of rope to be bound about him, knowing at the very moment of binding that it was to restrain his own involuntary struggles of nature with the agonies of death ; he must have seen the wood, and knife, and fire, undismayed ; he must have shared his father's faith, with this difference, that faith called him to *suffer*, and his parent to *do*.

Doing often includes suffering ; but suffering does not in itself always include doing ; there is a suffering which is strictly passive ; we have solely to endure. No act on our part is required by which affliction is brought upon us, but we have simply to own and kiss the rod—"Be still, and know that I am God." Perhaps our wealth is gone ; but we did not give it up ; we were not called to *forsake* houses and lands for Christ's sake—had it been so, then, *active* faith had been required. But no ! riches were *taken* from

us ; we were ruined by a shipwreck, a fall in prices, or some other sudden and inevitable calamity ; and thus, *passive* faith was demanded. The cross is *put* upon us ; we have not to *take* it up. The difference is obvious—Abraham offering up Isaac is the example of active faith ; Jacob bereaved of Joseph illustrates that which is passive. Active faith says, “Behold I go up to Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost witnessing in every city, that bonds and imprisonment await me ; ” Passive faith exclaims, “It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good ; the will of the Lord be done.”

Yet when we speak of any part of Christian character or conduct as passive, it must be a very contrast to apathy. The out-goings of the soul to the Saviour—the wrestlings of spirit with the God of Jacob—must be more numerous and earnest than ever. Many a sufferer mistakes a fainting fit for submission, and numbness of a stricken heart for that filial passiveness of which we speak ; just the same as a patient who has been suffering acute agony fancies that the absence of feeling, when mortification sets in, is a favourable sign of improvement. But the experienced Christian knows that this deadness is but unbelief ; he is sure that, contradictory as it may sound, there is not a more active state of mind than passive faith ; torpor would be its destruction ; it would cease to be faith, if it did not cling to God and His promises with an energy which calls into play every muscle and sinew of our spiritual man. Job's faith was eminently passive, yet Scripture does not relate a severer struggle of

soul than this Patriarch had to wage. And so with Asaph, when his "spirit was overwhelmed;" he did not abandon his soul to a sort of desperate composure, and thus sink into a state very little better than spiritual unconsciousness; but all overwhelmed as he was, still are we told, "My spirit made diligent search" (*Ps.* lxxvii. 6). "My son," saith God, "despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." Carelessness and Despondency are thus classed together; despising and fainting are put side by side; and so they ought to be; for both are resistance, the only difference being, that to despise the Lord's chastisement is *active* resistance, and to faint under it is *passive* resistance. Apathy, then, is no act of faith; for faith never goes to sleep; she never faints.

What then can we mean by *passive* faith? The term has simple reference to the mode in which we are to treat the trial in itself; we are not to contend against it; we are not to murmur against it; we are not, like restive oxen, to kick against the pricks which urge us forward; we are not to plunge and rear, and try to shake off the yoke and to escape the wholesome discipline of the goad. No! in all these particulars we must be motionless—still as the dead—passive; but there our passiveness must end; to carry it farther and stand still would be obstinate resistance; we must obey the rod and go on. Thus in relation to affliction *in itself*, faith is passive; but in relation to the *improvement* of trial, she must *always* be active.

Suppose a man on his road homewards were caught in a storm of rain, and shelter was impossible ; three courses lie open to him. Either he may watch the dark clouds with angry impatience, and passionately try to shake off the heavy drops as they shower upon him—such is the rebellious way of the world ; or else he may lie down in despair and perish—such is the unbelieving way of the faint-hearted mourner ; or else he may submit to the rain, without an impatient look at the clouds or a frantic attempt to keep himself dry, but every howl of the wind and driving of the sleet may only serve to make him quicken his eager steps towards home—such is the union of passiveness and activity which true faith teaches.

But this passive part of the work is anything rather than easy ; for though (as we have said) it is a hard thing to become the executioner of our own joys, and thus to practise active faith, yet we must not suppose the difficulty lies wholly on that side ; passive faith also has its peculiar trial. There is something about a state of inactive suffering which is prone to breed despondency ; the mind is apt to feed on its own sorrows. The soul of man, under such circumstances, is like an army compelled to lie still whilst nakedness and famine and drought are preying upon them ; so long as they remain thus, how fearfully are their pains magnified and multiplied by inaction ; but give the word to advance, show them the enemy and bid them charge, then will hunger, and cold, and thirst, be at least tolerable if not forgotten. Labour may bring with it much suffering ; we may struggle and be sorely

wounded ; we may toil and faint under our exertion ; the pain may be very great ; but then there is the influence of action to counteract that morbid tendency of the mind to despair, which is perhaps worse than any other suffering, external or internal. There is a buoyancy in action. Give the mind motion on a sea of grief and it will often float, when, if it stood still, it would have sunk. Spirit has some sort of analogy with matter in this respect—drop a stone as a dead weight on one spot in the water, and it will sink to the bottom ; but give it swift motion, by throwing it violently along the stream, and it will leap and skim over the surface as though it were rolling and bounding on solid ground. And often in the waters of sorrow, action is to the mind, what motion is to the stone ; by God's blessing, it prevents it from sinking ; and even when that motion is violent and full of pain, still it has none of that depressing effect which passive suffering is so apt to produce.

More especially is this pain of endurance difficult to an ardent and impetuous disposition. Peter could gird on a sword and use it too ; he could rush on an armed band, at the probable peril of death, and could smite off the ear of the High Priest's servant ; and yet the meekness to endure an unresented scoff for Christ's sake was not his—to dare death was easier than to endure shame. And there are multitudes who like the impetuous Apostle can *contend* for their Master, and yet cannot patiently and unresistingly *submit to suffer* for His sake ; they can be lions for the truth, but never do we see them as lambs “ led to

the slaughter," and as sheep dumb before their shearers. Alas! such men have much to learn; they are but headstrong recruits who mistake pugnacity for complete soldiership; they have yet to attain the sweetest trait of Christian character.

If the only attribute of that Spirit which leads us were Omnipotence, then might we expect to see an unqualified impetuosity of obedience in those whom He teaches; we might reasonably test His presence in us, by our powers of resistance and assault. Both on the contrary, we know that His peculiar attribute is of quite a different character—an attribute so pre-eminent that one of His names is founded upon it. He is never called "The Power," but He is called "The Comforter." To every time that He comes like a rushing mighty wind, He comes a hundred times like dropping rain and distilling dew—like small rain under the tender herb and like showers upon the grass. It is therefore specially the province of such a Spirit as this, to make the Christian a meek and uncomplaining sufferer beneath the rod, and to give him that faith which not only like Abraham can dare to do sacrifice, but like Isaac can bear to be sacrificed?

And never does the Spirit more effectually fulfil His office of Comforter than when He thus subdues the heart of God's child into complete submission. Passive faith is a state as happy as it is gentle; it is a profitable, as well as a dutiful grace; its fruit is joy and peace, as well as meekness, long-suffering, and patience. And hence it is, the Spirit in most cases performs His work of comfort by increasing this sub-

missiveness—this sure source of joy ; He does not alter circumstances, but moulds you to them ; He does not make the sun to rise, but He so adapts your vision to the darkness that your view is not impaired, but on the contrary, your landscape appears lovelier, and the objects seem softer and more mellowed than if beheld in the glare of noon day. The believer who has been taught this grace of passive faith, sees chastened joy where the world finds gloom alone. The shades of evening encompass him ; but what matters it ? At eventide there is light for him—not the light of day, but a sweeter light still—a light which softens, but does not hide—a light which paints the darkest grief with its own subdued and roseate hue. Oh, to carry about with us this grace of passive faith—this element of joy ! How independent shall we be of circumstances ! What a complete refutation shall we give to those who vainly tell us we are the slaves of externals ! No ! This Spirit-taught faith shall be like a branch of the tree thrown even into a Marah's waters, and making them sweet as that river which gladdeneth the city of God ; every stroke of the rod itself shall lose its smart, and become like these gentle strikings of a mother's hand when she soothes her babe to peace and sleep ; sorrow, tumultuous though its motion may appear to others, shall be like rocking to our cradle—it shall but assist our repose.

Sweet Spirit ! thine own gentleness impart,
To still the struggles of my wayward heart ;
Till, like a babe hushed on its mother's breast,
In God I find my joy—in Him my rest.

CHAPTER XV.

FAITH REWARDED.

THE reward of faith is so named because it is given to faith ; and not because it is given FOR faith. If you assert that we are saved and blessed *because* we believe, you as surely advocate salvation by works as though you taught men that a road of charities and penances was the way to heaven ; in fact, you make faith a work, and the reward is no longer of grace but of works. Faith is the *universal* concomitant of grace ; she is the *invariable* recipient of God's favours ; *none other* than she can take or enjoy them ; and yet she is *never* a meritorious cause of blessing.

But if God always bestows His love where faith is, and never where it is not, what, after all, does this amount to, but a recompence for the faith He sees there ? Such a question implies ignorance of the entire relation of faith to reward ; faith is a loosening of the heart's soil to receive grace ; it is an opening of the soul to admit favour ; it is a hand outstretched for offered gifts. Grace is no more a meritorious reward for faith than is the full corn a reward for the blade ; the latter is but a preparation for the former, and both are produced by the same husbandman. The relation therefore of faith to blessing is not the relation of a price to a purchase, but that which the excavation of a

channel bears to the water which is afterwards to flow into it. In fact, what is faith? It is a given grace; it is a gift (*Ephes.* ii. 8), the same as any other gift of God, with this exception—it is the *first* gift, and prepares the heart to enjoy all the rest.

True it is that Scripture often calls the result of faith a “reward,” but the word does not in any sense imply an *equivalent* for services—that is, *hire*; and even when service has been rendered, yet does the very term “reward” imply a disproportion between that service and the return which it can lawfully demand. More or less the principle of voluntary favour is always involved in every deed which can be called a reward; there is no idea of buying and selling in the word; reward is never a synonyme for a purchase, but is a distinct thing altogether. And as we ascend in the scale of givers, so does the idea of recompence become more and more remote, until it is at last excluded altogether. When stranger gives to stranger there may be some mercenary calculations, but when love gives to love then all thought of desert is banished; it is impossible for affection to traffic so much for so much; the heart knows nothing of that worldly standard of “*quid pro quo* ;” it bestows its blessing like a mother feeds her infant—she has no measurement nor limit but her babe’s well-being. And thus with our Heavenly Father; He will not dole out His gifts by the short measure of our deserts; but the full measure, pressed down, of His own affection for His child is the sole rule of His giving.

But though faith is never in any sense or degree the *measure of God's gifts*, yet is it at all times the *measure of our capacity* to receive them. And thus whilst it is true that God shall supply all your need "*according to his riches* in glory by Christ Jesus," yet is it equally true that "*according to thy faith*" (or according to thy *works as an evidence* of faith) "*so will it be done unto thee.*" We have said that faith is the preparation of the heart for Divine favours ; and just as that preparation is more or less complete—just as the soul is more enlarged—so more and more of faith's reward is poured in. Our spiritual man is always full of grace ; and when we have but little, it is because our stature is small, and our capacity contracted. We are like cisterns supplied by an ocean ; the waters of a fathomless sea are ours, and ready to gush into the soul ; our supply is infinite, and the only reason why our contents are not infinite too is that the vessel is so contracted. Let us always then act on these two truths—"*According to the riches of grace*" the Saviour gives ; and according to our need—our "*hunger and thirst after righteousness*" our spiritual capacity—our faith—we receive the gifts of Christ. What then should be our special prayer ? Certainly not "*Increase thy offered grace,*" for that is infinite already ; but "*Increase my faith*"—certainly not "*Enlarge thy love,*" for that is vast as eternity even now ; but "*Enlarge my heart.*"

Such then is the reward of faith ; it is given to faith not as a price to a work of merit, but as precious

seed to prepared ground—not as wages to a servant, but as love's offering to a son—not as an equivalent for value received, but as a free gift of infinite love in Christ Jesus ; it is not bounded on the part of the Giver by our deserts or any other limits whatever, but the only measure of limitation is found in our own self-contraction of heart.

And what of the reward itself? What was it in Abraham's case? One part of that reward was the restoration of Isaac. Yet what was this more than the father would have enjoyed if the son had never been taken to Moriah? Would it not have been the same if no faith had been required, and if Isaac had been allowed to remain undisturbed in the Patriarch's dwelling? What more did he receive back in reward than he gave in faith? Was not Isaac returned, the same Isaac as Isaac given? No! he was not; Isaac after being offered and restored, could not be the same to Abraham as if he had been unoffered and unrestored; he was a different son—a more precious son—a thousand-fold more precious. Oh! what must have been the mutual affection of father and son after passing through such a scene together! What overflowing tenderness must have filled the heart of Abraham as he afterwards looked on the boy, and thought of that moment when the willing and uncomplaining youth lay bound on the altar waiting the deadly stroke of his uplifted arm. *Could* Isaac be the same boy to him? Supposing by some fearful accident I had almost destroyed the child of my love; for days I watched him as life seemed rapidly ebbing; but suddenly

a change appeared, and the physician told me he was out of danger ; what would be my future feelings to that child ? Why ! under such circumstances even hatred has been known to warm into affection ; and how much more will a father's ready heart be kindled into an intensity of fondness ! Our Saviour himself founds some of his most beautiful parables on the principle that a thing lost, but restored, is dearer far to the finder than a thing never lost at all. Let the father's running step, his kiss and his embrace, his best robe and ring and fatted calf—let these declare how dear the prodigal has been made by this fact, "He was lost and is found, he was dead and is alive again." Isaac received as from the dead (*Heb. xi. 19*), was many former Isaacs concentrated into one ; Isaac restored was literally a reward—a thing given to faith—a thing which Abraham never possessed before.

And then what a hallowed and sacred association would ever after cling to that boy ! he had actually been solemnly offered to God ; he had lain on the Lord's altar ; Jehovah himself had interposed to save the boy ; he was more than a child of promise now. Isaac must have seemed a sacred and living epitome of Divine love, and never could his father have looked upon him without solemn thoughts of God. Isaac was an ever present image of God's favour—a living memorial of the Lord's faithfulness—he was grace incarnated—grace "manifest in the flesh." The promise of a Saviour through the seed of that boy was now made plainer than ever ; it was confirmed not merely by a miraculous birth but by an equally won-

derful preservation ; yea, by that scene on Moriah the son had become a very type of the desired Redeemer. I say then that a restored Isaac was to Abraham in every sense a sanctified Isaac, and as such, was in himself a reward of faith.

A trial sanctified is always a trial rewarded ; it always sweetens the true believer's blessings ; and though he may have no more outward causes of happiness than before—yea, though he may have even fewer—yet has the soul's palate been so freshened and improved that his actual perception of joy is ten-fold greater ; the change is not in the food but in the quickened appetite of the eater. Not a privilege has been added ; it may be that sickness or other afflicting agencies have robbed us of many we before possessed ; we cannot come so often to God's house ; we cannot obtain so much time for retirement ; and yet those privileges which are left are so much dearer to us that they are not to be compared with what they were before—they *were* cold, formal, and dead, they *are* the very "gate of heaven" to our soul ; our talents are fewer, but we have put them out to far better usury, and thus our sum total of spiritual happiness is largely increased. The Christian father loses his favourite boy—his only child ; yet if that bereavement be sanctified, there is such a yearning of heart towards the Saviour, such a heavenward aspiration of soul, and withal such a glowing hope of reunion with his sainted babe, that there is a positive gain of love and love's joy derived from the loss of his treasure. The believer's joys are like the vine—the more you lop away

its beauteous offshoots, providing you leave the parent trunk entire, the more numerous do those branches grow. His losses and bereavements are like the fall of the flower's petals, which does but develop and open out to the sun the all-important seed pod—a seed pod on which all the myriad flowers of a future spring depend. Faith then has a present reward, derived from the actual effects of the trial itself—an offered Isaac becomes, when sanctified, the very source of our gain.

But the consummation of faith's reward in Abraham's case was when, for the first time, he gazed on that incarnate Saviour born of his Isaac's seed. Great must have been his joy when he saw the Eternal Son in all the glory of his Godhead; but when he beheld his Lord becoming in very deed a child of Isaac and a Redeemer of the whole world, oh then he could understand in all their fulness and their depth those promises which were confirmed and enlarged on that Mount where his faith was so tried—then could he estimate in all its unmerited richness the infinite value of faith's reward.

And doubtlessly Abraham's constant and eager eye was fixed on that great consummation of faith. His joy in a restored Isaac did not hide from him the ultimate noon-day of his hope; and had we no other proof of the fact, certainly his dying charge to his servant (*Gen.* xxiv. 1—9) and Paul's description of his expectant state (*Heb.* xi. 13—16) are abundantly sufficient. It is an invariable truth that

present joys derived from sanctified trials never in any degree obscure the glory which shall be revealed, but on the contrary, as earnest of our inheritance, they sharpen our appetite for that feast whose foretaste is so sweet. All link us on to heaven ; they attract us thitherwards ; they have their top in heaven ; and whatever renders us satisfied with earth is no blessing—no reward of faith. With all our privileges and our spiritual joys, we “ desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.” Blessed though it is to *suffer* with Christ, yet it were contrary to the very nature of things, and an actual contempt of God’s promises, if we did not pant to *reign* with Him. Faith knows that suffering comes hand in hand with distance from the Lord’s peculiar glory, for in God’s own *immediate* presence suffering is impossible ; faith knows that she only delights in present joys because she has never tasted the joys of the world to come, and that when once the cup of heavenly bliss shall touch our lips then the sweetest cup of earth shall seem insipid ; faith knows that her very clearest and closest view of Christ is but a dim vision through a dark glass, and therefore she longs for the time when face to face and eye to eye her services shall be required no longer, sight shall take her place, and the vision shall be perfect. Yes ! anomalous though it seems, faith’s consummate reward, for which she longs, shall consist of faith’s extinction. Yet not exactly so ; for faith will not be destroyed but fulfilled. She will not exist it is true, and yet she will not die. Faith is the infancy, of our

spiritual being, and, like infancy, its future non-existence is not to be accounted a *destruction* but a *development*—a development into manhood. The actual vision of the glorified saint is faith's bud in full and eternal flower. Nothing which is holy and lovely in the Christian now shall be destroyed in his exaltation ; it is as true of each grace of the soul as it is of each soul itself—"I have lost none." Our glorification will not be a new birth—that is past ; externals may be all changed, but the soul shall be the same—its state the same (*Rev.* xxii. 11)—its graces the same, with this sole difference—they shall all be so infinitely expanded, matured, and fixed, that they shall bear to our earthly graces much the same likeness as the noble features of the man bear to the half-formed and indeterminate features of the new-born babe. "Brethren, *now* are we the sons of God ;" and though in the degree of resemblance to our Heavenly Father "it doth not yet appear what we shall be ;" yet this sonship can never be substituted for any other relation to God ; the believer on earth cannot be less than a son, and the saint in heaven cannot be more. The kingdom of God is within us now ; the seed which is to become the largest of all trees is already sown ; the redeemed population of heaven consists of the "spirits of just men *made perfect*"—*not recreated*. Oh ! then watch most constantly the growth of faith : do not suppose you are cultivating a grace which by and by will be annihilated. No such thing ! You are maturing a sweet blossom which in the ripened and

blooming form of fruit you shall enjoy for ever. The trial of faith is not labour lost, but it shall "be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

This then is the "end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls;" and where that faith is strongest there will our aspirations after final reward be most fervent. Oh! it is not discontent which groans "in this tabernacle," "being burdened." If it were, then the object of its groans would be a mere impatient desire to be "unclothed." But the Christian's groanings are quite different—quite superior; they are evidently the voice of faith, as she beholds in the glorious distance "mortality swallowed up of life," and transported by the sight, she groans—she earnestly desires, not for that she would be unclothed, but clothed upon with her house which is from heaven. (2 Cor. v. 2—5.) It is love of heaven and not disgust of sorrow which kindles her hope; it is attraction from above, and not repulsion from beneath, which fixes her desires on the future.

"Tis not that murmuring thoughts arise,
And dread a Father's will;
'Tis not that meek submission dies,
And will not suffer still.

It is that heaven-taught faith surveys
The sunny realms of light,
And longs her eagle plume to raise,
And lose herself in sight.

And if faith thus keeps her constant eye fixed on

this bright, holy, and Christ-pervaded consummation of her reward, the result is certain—our efforts will all take the direction of our heart, our steps will follow our eye, our thoughts and actions will tend upwards, and we shall gradually be “changed into the same glory” we contemplate, “from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord.”

THE END.









